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Follow the Little Pictures!



# Follow the Little Pictures!

BY

ALAN GRAHAM

William Blackwood and Sons  
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# Follow the Little Pictures!

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## CHAPTER I.

As I crossed the gangway that connected s.s. *Sphinx* with the quay, my mind was occupied with speculation as to the nature of my cabin mate. So much depends upon this chance association that it is of supreme importance to the pleasure and comfort of the voyage. Will he be old or young—taciturn or companionable? It is a pure lottery. He may be drunken and loathsome: on the other hand, the acquaintance so casually begun may develop into a life-long friendship.

It was in some such vein that my thoughts ran as I boarded the *Sphinx*.

“Forty-two, sir? This way, sir, please.”

I was early, and the cabin steward had time to be not only civil but obsequious.

"Oh no, sir, the other gentleman hasn't come aboard yet," he said, in answer to my inquiry. "So, of course, you have the choice of berths, sir. If I might advise, I would suggest the upper—if you are a good sailor."

"I don't get sick, if that is what you mean," I replied. "But I think I won't take possession of the upper berth until the other gentleman arrives. Just stow away my bags. I shan't unpack anything yet."

"Very well, sir. As you think best. But you would be quite within your rights, sir."

I left him and went on deck. I wanted that upper berth, but I also wanted to begin things with my cabin mate in friendly fashion. It would be a pity to antagonise him at the start by standing on my rights.

I stood lazily watching the increasing influx of passengers, hoping or fearing—according as the faces of the men attracted or repelled me—that each might be the sharer of my cabin.

It is not every one who cares to travel by the big palatial mail steamers, and the *Sphinx*—an old intermediate boat—was evidently going to be well filled. Amongst the first to attract my attention was a tall

elderly man whom I set down in my mind as an English country gentleman. He had the rich healthy complexion that comes of a life in the open, and his grey side-whiskers and shaven lip suggested at once the legendary figure of John Bull. There was an air of masterfulness, of obstinacy, about the man that made me judge him to be one whom it would be awkward to argue with.

I have said that he was amongst the first to attract my attention, but it was the girl who accompanied him that made me pick him from the common throng, and hope that it might be he who was to share my cabin and act as my introduction to the lady.

She was very beautiful. The travelling dress that she wore set off her figure to advantage. Though only of medium height, her carriage and the set of her head made her seem taller. It was the beauty of her face, however, that stirred me to admiration. She was not vivacious. The brown eyes were soft and dreamy, and the sweet full lips drooped compassionately at the corners. Withal there was a feeling of sadness about her, that to my mind added lustre to her beauty.

I was leaning on the rail close to the gangway, so that they passed close by me

as they came aboard. At that moment my polite cabin steward—now feverishly energetic—flitted across the deck.

“Hi, you there,” called the elderly gentleman in a peremptory tone. “Show us to our cabins. My name is Tanish—number thirty-seven, I believe.”

“Oh yes, sir—certainly, sir. Come this way. The other gentleman has just gone down, sir.”

“Other gentleman ! Who the devil’s he ?” Mr Tanish grew red in the face and his eyes seemed to swell in his head.

“The gent who has taken the other berth in thirty-seven, sir.”

Mr Tanish exploded with rage. I decided in my mind that I was glad he was not to share forty-two, even if I lost that introduction.

“I refuse to share my cabin,” he bellowed. “Do you hear ? I refuse to sleep above some damned Yankee bagman. I shall make a case of this ! They assured me at the booking-office that I should have——”

“Father !”

The girl, whose striking beauty had drawn my attention to the couple, laid her hand upon his arm and looked up at him appealingly.



He shook the little hand off roughly, and continued his tirade at the top of his hearty voice. But the girl was persistent. Again she pressed her father's arm, and said some words in a low voice.

Mr Tanish checked his flow of words, swallowed convulsively, and in a more reasonable tone said—

“Very well, Marigold, have it your own way. Show me this cabin, steward—and the scoundrel who thinks—— Yes, yes, Marigold, I *will* be patient—confound him!”

I turned to move away, feeling suddenly that I was an eavesdropper, and my movement attracted the attention of the steward. He recognised me, and with a few words of abject apology to Mr Tanish for the delay, he came over to my side.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, “but I thought you would be glad to know that you can have whichever berth you like. I find that you have the cabin to yourself. You are very fortunate, sir, for it is the only one on the ship that is not full up.”

I thanked him for the information, and with a servile bow he hurried back to the fuming Mr Tanish.

I watched the trio disappear below, and after a few moments, with no thought of

spying, but merely that I might lay out my belongings now that I knew I was to have the luxury of solitude, I followed.

As I went along the narrow corridor I walked into what promised to develop into an exciting rough-and-tumble. The sound of Mr Tanish's voice first advised me that something was amiss, and as I approached I found him browbeating a stranger whom in the dim light of the passage I could little more than distinguish. The steward had judiciously disappeared, and Miss Tanish stood by helplessly, having apparently given up hope of restraining her irascible father.

"The thing is an outrage !" Mr Tanish was shouting as I came within hearing. "The most astounding piece of villainy I have met with in all my experience !"

"I can assure you, sir, it's no fault of mine." The voice of the stranger sounded ludicrously mild and weak after Mr Tanish's domineering bass.

"You insult me by being on the ship, sir ! As for occupying the same room with you, I would rather sleep in the coal-bunkers. Any one else I might have borne with, but that it should be you, a mean swindling thief—What the devil do *you* want ?"

This last was to me. It was impossible to

pass without interrupting the scene, and I could stay no longer without risking a charge of spying. So, with a mild "Excuse me, please," I had attempted to push my way through.

"Oh, father, please, don't!" exclaimed the beautiful girl at this latest rudeness.

Whether it was the tremulous tone of her voice or the tears that floated on her beseeching eyes as she turned them from her father to me, as though begging me not to make a further scene, I cannot tell, but instead of explaining that I merely wanted to pass, I made a suggestion which until that moment had not crossed my mind.

I addressed myself to the stranger with the gentle voice, whom so far I had not rightly seen.

"Excuse my interference, sir," I said. "I couldn't help overhearing part of your conversation. There seems to be a slight misunderstanding, and as I have a two-berth cabin to myself I shall be pleased to have you share it—if *you* don't object, sir?" I could not help adding, turning at the same time to Mr Tanish.

"It has nothing to do with me," he replied, somewhat embarrassed, as irascible people are apt to be when reduced from bully-

ing to politeness. "I care nothing where he goes, provided that I am quit of him."

I turned to the man who was spoken of so contemptuously and repeated my offer.

"You're real good, young man," he said. "It seems to me the best thing I can do is to take you at your word."

"Very well. I'm number forty-two. Get the steward to fetch your things along."

They stood aside to let me pass. Mr Tanish made no acknowledgment as I raised my hat, but his daughter inclined her head, and the words, "Thank you," murmured almost under her breath, just reached my ear.

A moment before I had dubbed myself a silly ass for interfering in what was no concern of mine, and for giving up the comfort of my cabin to a man whom I had not even properly seen, and whom I had heard called a mean swindling thief; but that gently breathed word of thanks altered my outlook, and I went on to my cabin feeling repaid for the sacrifice of my comfort.

A minute or two later there was a knock upon my door. It opened in response to my invitation, and for the first time I saw the features of the man who was to mean so much in my life.

It is difficult to give an adequate descrip-

tion of Jabez Morgan. As he entered my cabin, with an amiable smile upon his clean-shaven face, I set him down at once as harmless and insignificant. He had sandy hair and light eyebrows and lashes. His grey eyes looked out with an appearance of wonder from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. His somewhat pale face had no outstanding characteristics to give it distinction. The nose was medium in size and inclined to snub. The cheeks were full and rounded into the chin, so that the jawbone was hidden and gave no index to character. His clothing—some kind of tweed—was neither new nor old. Altogether Jabez Morgan was the kind of man whom one would pass a dozen times and still fail to recognise at the thirteenth meeting. In age he might have been anything from twenty-eight to forty-five.

“At least,” I thought, as I glanced at the mild expression of the newcomer, “there will be no trouble about that upper berth.”

“I do feel grateful, young man,” he said as he entered. “My baggage is outside. If I may, I’ll let the steward bring it in.”

“Certainly,” I replied — adding inanely, out of an instinctive desire to be polite, “just make yourself at home.”

Taking me at my word, he called in the



steward and proceeded to stow away his belongings.

“Just put that grip in the upper berth, steward. This gentleman will be taking the lower.”

I protested at once.

“Not at all,” I said hurriedly. “I would prefer——”

“No, no, sir,” he interrupted. “I’m an interloper, and must rough it a bit. You have done enough for me already. That’s right, steward—the upper berth.”

I made some further attempt at protest, but the man seemed so convinced that he was doing me a favour that at last I gave it up, although with an uneasy feeling at the back of my head that I had been done.

When the steward had left us to ourselves, the little man—I always feel inclined to call him little, for he gave that impression, though as a matter of fact he was really of quite average height—proceeded to unpack, conversing with me as he bent over his portmanteau.

“Lucky for me you happened along when you did. You see, our friend objects to me using this earth at all. Mind you, it’s my fault—entirely my fault. I’ve kind of an-

noyed him one way and another. By the way, my name is Morgan—Jabez Morgan. What's yours?"

He beamed at me through his spectacles, pausing in his unpacking while he awaited my answer.

"Robert Seaton—at your service, Mr Morgan," I replied.

"At yours, Mr Seaton," said he, not to be outdone in politeness. "You will find me grateful for your kindness, sir. Everything shall be as *you* want it here, for the cabin is yours by right. And that reminds me—you won't have any objections, will you now, to me bolting the door at night? I'm so very nervous I couldn't sleep unless I knew the door was securely bolted."

Now I have a rooted objection to bolted doors. I hate to feel that I am under any restraint, and on a ship especially one wants to be able to get out quickly.

I told Mr Morgan my views as plainly as I could.

"That's all right," he replied in his gentle way. "You leave it to me. Everything in this cabin must be just as you would have it."

With this somewhat indeterminate answer he left the subject, and soon after we went

on deck to see the *Sphinx* cast off from the wharf.

Yet that night as we sailed out into the Atlantic upon our voyage to England, Mr Morgan proved that he was not so easily detached from the object he had in view. I was the first to get into my berth—the berth which, by the way, he had chosen for me—and I heard the click as he switched off the light. Then just before he climbed to the upper bunk, I was certain that I heard the bolt shot softly in the door.

I smiled to myself at his persistence, and turned over to go to sleep. Then that bolt began to worry me—to take up a larger and larger part of my thoughts, until at last I realised that there would be no sleep for me until it was shot back.

I stepped quickly to the floor, and slipped back the bolt.

Next morning I was first afoot. I put on my dressing-gown and turned the handle of the door. It did not open, for the bolt was shot.

Oh yes, for all the insignificance of his appearance, Jabez Morgan was a man who liked to have his own way.



## CHAPTER II.

I HAVE described my meeting with Jabez Morgan, and with Dougal Tanish and his daughter Marigold, in some detail, because upon that meeting depended the whole future course of my life. Thrown thus across my path, they diverted me into mystery and adventure which but for this chance meeting I would never have known.

I was on my way to England to seek my fortune—a reversal of the usual process surely, for it is the enterprising young man from the old country who, as a rule, goes out to seek his fortune in the States. But I was *not* an enterprising young man. I was much too fond of dreaming and of speculating upon the characters and motives of the people with whom I came in contact to be a success in America. I did not like the rawness and crudity of my native land—for so I must call it, though my mother was Scottish and my father English by birth and upbringing.

Unfortunately for me, both my parents died while I was still at Harvard, leaving me with a small but certain income. I was alone in the world. I finished my course, which was in medicine, and left college fully qualified to practice my profession. But as I have said, the States did not appeal to me. I longed to see the old country, the home of my parents.

So at the age of twenty-five you see me on board the *Sphinx*, with no settled aim except that of going to England. I did not intend to be a mere sightseer, but I had enough money for my needs, and I could afford to wait until I found some occupation that was congenial to me. . . .

I said nothing to Jabez Morgan about my discovery of his pertinacity, but I made up my mind that I would not be bolted in another night. At breakfast, which was the first regular meal since the vessel sailed, I had him beside me. Mr Tanish and his daughter were seated at another table.

Morgan had little to say for himself. He was pleasant and amiable, and always ready to beam through his spectacles when spoken to, but he rarely ventured a remark himself. I decided that unobtrusiveness must be added to his negative qualities.

Later in the morning as I wandered aim-

lessly round the deck I encountered Mr Tanish and his beautiful daughter seated in a sheltered spot. The lady smiled pleasantly at my approach, but my astonishment was infinite at the demeanour of her father.

"Good morning, sir," he cried jovially. "Enjoying the sea breezes? Ah, this is grand after the stuffy New York air! Sit down and have a chat."

He pulled an empty deck-chair round to his side, and in a minute or two we had exchanged names and I had been introduced to his daughter.

Mr Tanish was almost boisterously cheerful. It was obvious that he was trying to efface the impression he had made on the previous day. In fact, after a few minutes' trivial conversation, he referred to the matter directly.

"If the weather keeps like this the voyage should be a pleasant one," he remarked. "We'll be seeing a lot of each other— And that reminds me, you'll not judge an old man by his uncertain temper, Mr Seaton? I had a trying day yesterday, and maybe I happened to—to show it a bit. My daughter tells me I made some remarks in your hearing about the gentleman you so kindly shared your cabin with, and she thinks—I mean I

should say that I have no reason to question that gentleman's honesty. He and I have met before, and disagreed upon a—upon a— a matter of business. Naturally it would have been unpleasant to us both to have had to share a cabin."

I could see that it went very much against the grain with Mr Tanish to eat his words, and I could tell by her face that his daughter was relieved when the explanation was made. For myself, I felt uncomfortable—as one always does when subjected to apologies. I could but stammer that "it was of no consequence," and change the subject as quickly as possible.

A few minutes later it was demonstrated that the "business disagreement" still rankled in Mr Tanish's mind. Jabez Morgan strolled past us along the deck. He smiled amiably upon me and raised his cap upon seeing with whom I was engaged. His eye travelled to Mr Tanish, and he seemed prepared to smile upon him also, but he was met by a scowl so vicious that he passed hurriedly on. Mr Tanish muttered to himself and seemed upon the verge of an outbreak, but I saw his daughter's hand pressed upon his arm and the storm failed to burst.

I found myself wondering what there could

be between these two men to make one of them so hot against the other, who, on his part, seemed quite calm and free from any ill-will. The sight of Morgan quite upset Mr Tanish. He ceased to pour out jovial small-talk, and in a few minutes, with a word of excuse, he got up and strode away.

I immediately moved into his chair, which brought me in closer touch with his daughter. So far she had hardly spoken, and—young and impressionable as I was—I was anxious to make her fuller acquaintance.

“Will you let me thank you for bringing to an end a—a scene which was paining me very much?” she said in a low sweet voice, and with a pretty flush playing upon her soft cheeks. “I feel very greatly in your debt!”

“Please don’t feel that,” I replied lightly, “or you will soon cultivate a dislike for me. People generally learn to hate their creditors, and I should be very sorry to get into your bad graces.”

“I think there is no danger of that, Mr Seaton,” replied Miss Tanish. “There is another thing I feel that I ought to say. My father told you he had nothing against Mr Morgan, but I am afraid his manner may have led you to think differently. My father



is very strong in his likes and dislikes, and, as he has had a difference with Mr Morgan, he carries it rather to extremes. It is only fair that you should know that he has really nothing against Mr Morgan. Neither my father nor I know anything about him except that he would not do what father wanted him to do ; and I think he was acting quite within his rights, although my father does not agree."

"I quite understand," I replied. "So we need not worry about my cabin mate any more. I shall not judge him by anything Mr Tanish may have said in the heat of the moment."

"Thank you, Mr Seaton," said Miss Tanish, with a pretty grateful smile.

With that we left the subject and whiled away the next hour with the usual surface talk which is all that is open to such casual acquaintances. Several times Jabez Morgan passed by, and each time it seemed to me that he longed to join us but feared a rebuff. After several turns up and down the deck he apparently plucked up the necessary courage, for he stopped in his walk and quietly slipped into the chair I had vacated when Mr Tanish left us.

He coughed in a gentle apologetic way,

and leaning across me raised his hat to Miss Tanish.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" he asked mildly.

Miss Tanish bowed in an embarrassed manner, but said no word.

"I only wanted to say, Miss Tanish, that of course I don't associate you in any way at all with the remarks that your father has thought fit to make about me. I quite understand that——"

"On the contrary, you altogether misunderstand!" Miss Tanish interrupted with flashing eyes, and in the contraction of her brows and the slight protrusion of her jaw I saw a hint of her pugnacious father for the first time.

"Although I may not altogether agree with my father's method of expressing himself, we are quite at one in thinking that it is an impertinence that you should be aboard this ship. Now that you are aware of my feeling in the matter, you can surely have no further wish to speak to me."

This was most embarrassing to me. I seemed to be continually forced into the midst of disputes with which I had no concern. It was the more awkward in that but a short hour before Miss Tanish had ex-

pressed to me an altogether different view of Morgan. I could not even rise and leave them, for Jabez was still leaning across me, with his spectacles intent on Miss Tanish's face.

He retained his expression of unruffled calm notwithstanding the cutting words and contemptuous tone.

"Surely, Miss Tanish, there is all the more need for me to speak, when you have such a distorted idea of my character," he replied calmly.

"I judge you by your actions, which are perfectly well known to me. I wish to know no more of you."

"In a few words I can explain everything——"

But Miss Tanish was gone. Morgan started up as though to follow her, but I pushed him back into his chair, and kept him there until she had disappeared.

"Dear, dear, dear," he said mildly, when his eyes could follow her no longer. "How very distressing! Now I *would* have liked to explain myself—to clear things up a bit."

"Well, look here, Mr Morgan," I replied, rather crossly I believe, "next time you want to have anything out with anybody, for Heaven's sake don't start when I'm



around. It's damned unpleasant to have a slanging match going on across one's knees."

The poor little man seemed quite hurt at my tone.

"Dear, dear, dear," he said, his mild face smiling with its customary lack of expression. "Please don't get your back up against me too, Mr Seaton. I shan't have a friend aboard the ship if you desert me. I owe you a debt of gratitude, you know, and I would do anything rather than offend you."

He was so earnest about it that I felt rather ashamed of the tone in which I had spoken.

"Well, never mind," I said more amiably. "But it is very embarrassing for a stranger to be mixed up in disputes of which he knows nothing."

"Yes, yes, of course. It was very stupid of me—very stupid indeed. Now do come and have a cocktail with me before lunch, just to show that you bear me no ill-will."

So, through the medium of that greatly overrated abomination, we attained to our former footing, and spoilt our appetite for good wholesome food—for there is no greater delusion than that of the appetiser.

## CHAPTER III.

I HAD made up my mind that I would not be bolted into my cabin another night, and with this end in view I hung about the smoking-room until I felt sure that Morgan was safe in his bunk. When at last I did retire, I found that I had judged rightly, for he was to all appearances already asleep, with his face turned to the wall. I undressed quietly, and just before switching off the light I plugged the socket into which the bolt should shoot with a piece of pencil previously cut so that it should fit tightly.

There was no possibility of getting the plug out. It fitted perfectly, and there was nothing projecting that he could get hold of. Chuckling silently at my own ingenuity, I switched off the light and got into my bunk.

I intended to remain awake if possible to see how Morgan would take his disappointment. After a few minutes I simulated the

heavy regular breathing of sleep, but I had almost given up hope and gone to sleep in good earnest before anything happened.

Just as I began to grow drowsy, however, I heard the soft rustle of the sheets above me, and Morgan slipped slowly out of his bunk to the floor. I heard the faint sound of the bolt striking my obstruction several times, and then Morgan seemed to realise the state of affairs, for with a faint "dear, dear," he desisted from his efforts.

He did not immediately return to bed, however. I heard his subdued movements about the cabin without at first guessing his intention. A faint scraping sound upon the floor puzzled me for a moment, and then I realised that he meant to barricade the door with his cabin trunk.

That would be worse than being bolted in, I thought. I was determined that he should not have his way. Slipping silently over the edge of my bunk I groped for the switch, and in a moment changed the scene from darkness to light.

Yes, I had guessed rightly. Morgan was in the act of sliding his trunk against the door. As he looked up at me in the sudden flare of light I hardly knew him, so altered did he seem. Yet it was a very little thing

that had changed him—merely that in getting into bed he had taken off his spectacles. The eyes that looked straight into mine had lost the mild inquiring look to which I had grown accustomed, and in its place I thought I recognised the resolute expression of a masterful man, determined upon having his way.

As though realising something of this, he released the handle of the trunk, and crossing to his bunk drew from under his pillow a case from which he took his spectacles.

As he put them on he remarked apologetically—

“I am so very short-sighted, you know,” and smiled upon me with his usual wide-eyed innocence.

So far, not a word of his manoeuvres with the cabin trunk. As I was absolutely determined that I would not be locked, bolted, or barricaded in again, I went straight to the point.

“Surely you remember, Mr Morgan, that when you first suggested bolting the door at nights I told you I objected to it. You must also remember that you are in this cabin on my invitation, and that you distinctly and of your own free will said that every-

thing would be as I wished. Yet you persistently go against me in this matter."

"Everything you say is right, Mr Seaton—every word of it. I may appear to be treating you unfairly, but I assure you I am not. You may hardly credit it," and here he treated me to his most ingenuous smile, "but the fact is—I walk in my sleep. You woke me up by switching on the light. I quite admit that I should prefer to have the door bolted. There are reasons—but there, I suppose I must have had it on my mind, and so in my sleep I got up to bolt it."

I did not believe one preposterous word of it, but there seemed nothing to gain by calling the man a liar.

"Well, now that you are awake again," I said, "let us push back this trunk and return to our bunks."

He made no protest, but with a sigh of resignation acceded to my request. I watched him into his bunk, and with an abrupt "Good-night," switched off the light and lay down to sleep.

How long I had slept I do not know, when I was awakened by the feeling that there was light in the room. I opened my eyes, but there was nothing to be seen. The cabin was inky black. I lay still for a little



while wondering why I had awakened—for I am a sound sleeper—and I was on the point of closing my eyes again when a very faint but sudden light appeared in the room. It was a weird greenish glow, so dim that it did not even light up the walls, and before I could locate its source it vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

I wondered if I could have been mistaken. There was no sound but the heavy breathing of Jabez Morgan in the bunk above me. I lay perfectly still and tried to imitate the steadiness of his respiration.

Again the darkness was diffused with green. The light seemed more dense near the floor, but before I could be sure of anything it had gone again. I was now thoroughly alert — fully awake — and I listened intently for anything that would give me a clue to the mystery. I was perfectly certain that some one was in the cabin, and that for no honest purpose. This time it was not Jabez Morgan moving in the dark, for I could still hear his regular breathing above me.

A faint creaking, which I recognised at once as caused by the hinges of a trunk, confirmed my suspicion. In a moment I had leapt from my bunk and clicked the switch—

but no light appeared. I stood silent, listening. I could no longer hear the heavy breathing of Morgan, and guessed that my movements had awakened him. At first there was a dead silence, and then a slight metallic rattle—as of the door-handle suddenly clutched.

I stepped quickly forward in the darkness, stumbled over a heavy body—a cabin trunk—and measured my length on the floor. As I fell, my hand encountered the clothing of our unseen visitor, and I clutched at him and brought him down with me.

There was a confused struggle on the floor. My opponent made no attempt to hit out at me, but confined his efforts to freeing himself from my grip.

As we struggled, the gentle voice of Jabez Morgan broke the silence.

“Dear, dear! Whatever is the matter?”

“Give me a hand here, Morgan,” I called. “I’ve got hold of a burglar.”

“I’m with you,” he replied, and I heard him alight on the floor.

A moment later, as I had almost got the unknown securely held, I was seized from behind by the arms and pulled back.

“Let go, you fool,” I exclaimed. “You’ve got the wrong man!”

But he still hung on to me, gripping me so that his fingers bit into my flesh, and the unknown, taking advantage of the diversion, wriggled from beneath me.

I heard the door open, and slam again.

"Let go, you fool," I shouted again. "We can still catch him in the corridor."

"Dear me! Am I holding *you*, Mr Seaton?" exclaimed Morgan inanely, and without slackening his grip. "Hadn't we better have the light on?"

"The light has been tampered with," I replied. "Let me go! You have managed to let him get off scot free—if that is any satisfaction to you."

He released me now, but it was hopeless to follow. The intruder could easily have disappeared in the few moments that had passed.

I found some matches and struck a light. The floor was littered with clothing from the ransacked trunk. As the match burnt down I noticed the electric bulb of our light lying upon the settee. It had been disconnected. I quickly clicked it back into its place, and the cabin was flooded with light.

At the same moment I found that I was clutching in my left hand something small and hard. It was a ring. I must have torn



it from the finger of the intruder at the moment of his escape.

"Our friend has been taking an almighty interest in my underclothing," remarked Morgan, who had been bending over the ransacked trunk. "Your outfit hasn't even been opened out."

"Is anything gone?" I asked.

"I don't know about anything, but dollars evidently don't appeal to him. Look at this!"

*This* was a pocket-book, well filled with notes, which had evidently been thoroughly overhauled, for the contents of the various compartments were partially pulled out—some papers even being scattered on the floor.

I now discovered the origin of the dim green light which had roused me from my sleep. It was a pocket electric lamp with a piece of thick green cloth tied over the bulb end. It gave the merest shadow of a light when the button was pressed, but sufficient to guide the thief in his search, no doubt.

"A second clue," I exclaimed, as I examined this find.

"What is the other?" asked Morgan, who had been looking at the lamp as I turned it over in my hands.

“A ring which I took from the finger of the thief!”

I held the ring up to the light to examine it. It was a heavy signet ring with an intaglio crest cut upon a bloodstone. I had just succeeded in making out the general outline of the crest—which seemed to be an eagle with spread wings with a scroll beneath—when Morgan eagerly took the ring from my hand and looked closely at it.

“Why, that’s my ring,” he exclaimed with a laugh. “I must have dropped it on the floor when I undressed, and you must have clutched at it in the struggle!”

I looked him in the spectacles sharply, but he returned my look, wide-eyed and bland.

“I was under the impression,” I answered pointedly, “that I had drawn it from the finger of the thief just before he escaped.”

“Very likely you did,” agreed Morgan readily. “He must have found it on the floor, you see, picked it up, and put it on his finger. Probably it did not fit him and came away easily when you pulled it.”

As he spoke he casually placed the ring on his little finger. I had never noticed a ring there before. In fact I could almost have sworn that he did not wear one. Yet there was his word against my confused recollec-

tion, and I felt that I had no ground to protest.

Morgan proceeded, with my assistance, to repack his scattered belongings.

"I suppose we had better wait until morning before we report this business," I remarked while we were thus engaged. "It seems hardly worth while to make a disturbance in the middle of the night."

"Report it!" exclaimed Morgan, pausing in his labours to look up at me with an air of surprise. "Why should we report it? We have lost nothing, and we shall only put ourselves and the other passengers to a lot of inconvenience and cause a great deal of mutual suspicion if we let this go any further."

"But, my dear Mr Morgan, surely you don't suggest that we leave the thief free to ransack the passengers' luggage for the rest of the voyage?" I exclaimed, astonished at his suggestion.

"He had a good fright to-night. That should keep him from repeating his performance, I guess. Besides, there is another point of view, Mr Seaton. We shall have to explain that but for your insistence on having our door unbolted the thief could not have got at my trunk."

He smiled blandly at me as he made this insinuation.

"Do you suggest," I answered hotly, "that I was in league with the thief?"

"Oh, dear, dear, no!" protested Morgan. "Only there is the possibility that the captain might have his suspicions, and it would be very unpleasant—very unpleasant indeed."

"It seems to me that your own anxiety to have the door bolted is at least as open to suspicion. One might deduce that you expected a nocturnal visitor."

Morgan looked at me steadily and thoughtfully for a few moments, then placing his hand on my shoulder he smiled pleasantly.

"Dear, dear," he said. "You are a knowing one, Mr Seaton. You've hit it in once. Now this nocturnal visitor, as you call him, don't concern you at all. It's me he's after. It don't suit me to publish the glad news of his call to all and sundry, so why should you interfere? You can safely leave it to me to get my own back on the perisher. You see I'm quite open and frank with you, Mr Seaton, don't you?"

I did not see, but as I was heartily tired of the whole business, I gave a grudging consent to his plea for silence and retired to my bunk.

## CHAPTER IV.

NOTWITHSTANDING my disturbed night's rest, I awoke early and lay thinking over the experiences of the night. I felt very sick with myself for so readily falling in with the wishes of Jabez Morgan. I did not trust the man. I felt perfectly certain that he had lied to me twice at least in the course of the night—first regarding his alleged sleep-walking, and second when he so impudently took possession of the ring which, I still felt convinced, belonged to our nocturnal visitor.

The fact that he was so anxious to prevent any one getting in, and yet equally anxious to keep the fact of the intrusion dark, convinced me that he was engaged upon some scheme that would not bear inspection. Then there were the words of Mr Tanish—"a mean swindling thief!"

I dressed quietly and went on deck, leaving Morgan still asleep, and heartily wishing



I had never offered him a share of my cabin. Although it was still early, I found that Miss Tanish was before me. She saw me as I came up the companion, and greeted me with a pleasant smile of welcome. I thought her even more beautiful than before, as the breeze fluttered her dark curls and brought the warm blood flowing to her cheeks.

“Good morning, Mr Seaton,” she greeted me. “Come and join me in my tramp round the decks. It will give you an appetite for breakfast.”

I was not slow to accept the invitation, and soon we were chatting more intimately than on the previous day. The Tanishes were, as I had guessed, a Scotch family, with an estate on the Ayrshire coast. Mr Tanish was a widower, with a grown-up son and daughter, and in addition a little boy of seven, who was his son by a second wife.

“This is the first time I have been abroad,” continued Miss Tanish, “except when I was at school in Belgium—a convent school. My father had business in America, and by the aid of much coaxing I prevailed on him to take me with him. That is how we came to meet Mr Morgan,” she added hesitatingly. “In business—as you were present yesterday when he spoke to me and I was very rude to



him, it is only fair to repeat that—notwithstanding my rudeness—he is, so far as I know, a perfectly honest man.”

This was said with so much embarrassment and hesitation that I did not know what to think or say. I had heard so many conflicting statements regarding Morgan’s character that I had become quite wandered amongst them.

“As Mr Morgan is only a casual acquaintance of mine it does not matter what I think of him, Miss Tanish,” I said. “In return for your confidence, may I tell you a little about myself?”

I was proceeding to do so when my companion’s father appeared on deck, obviously looking for his daughter. He saw us and came to meet us.

“Good morning, Marigold,” he said, and kissed her upon the cheek. “Good morning, sir. You young folks are early risers.”

“Your daughter has just been telling me that you are Scotch,” I said. “I can claim some relationship, as I am half a Scot myself. My mother was an Ayrshire woman.”

“Ay, ay,” said Tanish with some show of interest. “North or South Ayrshire?”

“I am not sure where one stops and the

other begins," I said laughingly. "I have never visited my native land. My mother was born and bred near Girvan."

We continued to chat as we walked up and down, and I told the Tanishes pretty much what I have already recorded of myself in these pages. Mr Tanish appeared to take considerable interest in my history.

"Ye'll be thinking of visiting up north, I suppose?" he said. "It's a grand country. The Firth o' Clyde's not to be beat for scenery wherever ye may go."

"Yes; I hope to have a trip there some time or another. But my plans are quite unformed. I intend to have a good look round in the hope of finding some congenial occupation."

"We must have another chat over this, Dr Seaton," said Mr Tanish, looking at me thoughtfully. "Something might come of it to our mutual advantage. But there's no hurry. We shall be seeing plenty of each other these next few days."

"Why, father," exclaimed Miss Tanish, catching hold of her father's left hand, "what have you done to your little finger?"

I noticed then that the finger was bound up with a strip of handkerchief.

"My razor slipped as I was stropping it

this morning. I only bound it up because the blood made such a mess. It is really nothing at all."

"But you have taken off your ring, father!" said the girl again in an astonished tone. "I have never seen you without the family seal before."

"Good heavens, girl, don't be a fool!" Tanish's eyes blazed with sudden fury, and his cheeks became diffused with a ghastly purple. "Why must you comment on every insignificant detail of my dress? Am I a child or a thief that I should be watched over like this? Am I answerable to you for every stud or pin or link that I choose to put on or take off?"

During the first few words of this tirade Marigold Tanish stood as though struck dumb with astonishment. Before her father reached the end, she turned on her heel and walked off, disappearing down the companion-way.

Mr Tanish stood silent, breathing heavily. Gradually his face assumed its normal expression, and he turned a curious inquiring look upon me, as though summing up the effect that his outbreak had had on me.

"You must excuse the irritability of an old man," Dr Seaton, he said, with a self-con-

scious smile. "It's nothing more, and my daughter is used to it."

I murmured a few confused words, for the scene had embarrassed me considerably. We resumed our walk, but as we neared the companion, by some evil chance Jabez Morgan was making his way on deck. He saw us at once, and instead of avoiding us as I hoped, he turned in our direction. He was smoking a cigarette, and as he came near he raised his left hand to it, displaying the ring upon his little finger ostentatiously.

At sight of it my companion stopped dead and swayed upon his feet so that I thought he would have dropped. I seized him by the arm to support him.

Jabez Morgan smiled his bland smile, and with a bright "Good morning," passed on.

Mr Tanish pulled himself together with an effort.

"I—I'm afraid I'm rather—rather out of sorts this morning," he stammered. "I think I—I'd better go and see after my daughter."

With that he left me abruptly and went below. . . .

My mind was in a whirl. Could it really be true that this elderly man—pompous and irritable, but obviously a gentleman—was

the burglar of the previous night? The thing seemed to be beyond doubt. All his actions betrayed him. His unreasonable rage at his daughter's discovery, the injury to his finger, and finally his dismay at the sight of the ring on Morgan's finger—all pointed infallibly to the same conclusion.

Yet how could I reconcile his obvious standing in the world, his obvious character as displayed in the few scenes in which I had encountered him,—to say nothing of the character of his daughter as I already felt I knew her,—with the behaviour of our visitor of the night? I couldn't!

That there was something serious behind all this I felt certain. Morgan and Tanish had some deep-seated feud, I imagined, but as to who was in the right I was entirely in the dark.

In this mood of speculation I reached the breakfast-table, to find Morgan already in his place.

"You were up early, Mr Seaton," he said. "Your pal, the Squire, hardly seemed very fit this morning, I thought. Looks as if he were a gouty subject."

"I don't know him well enough to say," I replied distantly. "I see you are wearing your ring. It is strange that I had not



noticed it until it was brought into prominence in the night."

"It is always the way," said Morgan easily; "once you have noticed a thing like that you keep on seeing it. Nice ring, isn't it?" He shoved his hand in front of me. "It belonged to an ancestor of mine who crossed the pond at the time of the Jacobite risings. He was a Royalist, and got chivied out, I guess."

I examined the ring closely, and was able to read on the scroll beneath the spread wings of the eagle the words, "Haud Ticht."

"Then I take it you are of Scotch descent?" I asked.

"Sure! I reckon the blood has got thinned down some in the course of time, but it's there safe enough."

Our conversation was quite private, as our neighbours on each side had not yet put in an appearance. Morgan gave a quick glance round as though to make sure of this, and then turning to me said abruptly—

"I'm sorry your new friends don't think a lot of me."

"They certainly don't," I replied baldly.

"Dear, dear! It's a very great pity! I have an intense admiration for Miss Tanish."

"Judging by her treatment of you yes-



terday, I shouldn't fancy that she reciprocates it," I answered maliciously.

"I'm afraid not." The little man sighed and shook his head. "But I reckon to get over that. I'm misunderstood some, Mr Seaton. I suppose I don't look a winner in the sentiment line, but looks don't go for much, and if ever a man was struck on a girl, I'm he. If my chance looks poor now, it's up to me to improve it."

As he made this statement he eyed me questioningly, as if he were trying to estimate my own feelings towards Miss Tanish, or possibly warning me off what he considered his own preserve. Whatever his object, I determined that he should get no satisfaction from me.

"You have certainly a lot of leeway to make up before you can consider yourself in the running," I said.

He agreed with his usual ready smile.

"But perhaps you could put in a good word for me, Mr Seaton. You seem likely to see a good deal of the Tanishes during the voyage, and you might help to let them see me in a better light."

"I can hardly promise that," I answered with decision. "I know very little about the Tanishes, and still less about you. I

already find myself mixed up far more than I like in your somewhat mysterious quarrels, and I intend to keep out of them for the future."

I said this, little knowing how thoroughly I was fated to be involved in the troubles and mysteries that surrounded the Tanish family.

The arrival of other passengers who sat opposite us at table brought this rather intimate conversation to an abrupt conclusion.

"I'm sorry," Morgan said simply, and lapsed into silence.

As for me, I was astonished at his confession. The idea of this insignificant spectacled little man as the husband of a beautiful girl like Marigold Tanish was grotesque. How far my own feelings in the matter influenced my opinion I cannot say, but I cannot deny that I looked upon Marigold with more than ordinary interest. I was young and she was beautiful, and the routine of life aboard ship threw us much together.

Perhaps I was hardly in a position to view Morgan's disclosure with cold-blooded impartiality !

## CHAPTER V.

As the days went by, my intimacy with Marigold Tanish increased. The bulk of the passengers aboard the *Sphinx* were of an uninteresting commercial type, and the Tanishes and myself were thrown much together. As for Jabez Morgan, I saw little of him except at meals and in our joint cabin. I must admit, however, that I was thoroughly defeated in the matter of the bolting of the cabin door. After the practical lesson that I had had of the necessity for this precaution, I could no longer uphold my claim to the open door, and Morgan cleared my pencil wedge from the socket with obvious satisfaction, and bolted the door each night after I was abed.

We had delightfully calm weather, and I spent most of my time sitting on deck, talking with Marigold or playing chess with her father.

My relations with the latter were cordial,

notwithstanding what had passed. I knew, or practically knew, that he had entered our cabin in the night, intent upon stealing something in the possession of Jabez Morgan. I knew that his temper was not of the best, and that in his fits of rage he behaved to his daughter abominably. To me, however, he was always civil—even genial. Perhaps my chess-playing had something to do with the liking he took to me. He was a very keen player, but hardly up to my level, and I found I could mate him as often as I cared to. On the rare occasions on which I let him beat me, his delight was amusing to watch.

But it was the hours I spent talking to Marigold that were most enjoyable to me. I am sure that in these few days I told her every incident of importance in my past life, and if she was more reticent—well, her life had not been so simple and happy as my own. For this I noticed—that no matter how interested and animated she might grow, there was always a shadow of unhappiness at the back of her beautiful dark eyes.

Often her father would join us in our talks, and I got to know quite a lot about the village of Kilbrennan on the Ayrshire coast facing the beautiful island of Arran, and

about Hopeton, the family seat of the Tanishes.

It was during one of these talks, on the second last day of our voyage, that Tanish made the proposal which finally brought me within the circle of mystery and tragedy that surrounded himself and his family.

We had been talking of my own Scottish origin, and I happened to remark that some day I must visit Girvan and see for myself the surroundings in which my mother had been brought up.

"How would you like to combine pleasure with business?" demanded Tanish abruptly.

"It would depend very much upon the nature of the business," I replied, with the caution I must have inherited from my Scottish mother.

"Hum! A very good answer. My daughter tells me that you are a fully qualified doctor?" he added in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes," I assented. "But I have never practised, so far."

"And I daresay your general education is well up to the level of tutoring a boy of eight?"

"I think there is little doubt of that—though I have certainly never done any teaching."



“Well, Mr Seaton, here’s a business proposition. Do you care to take on the job of medical attendant and tutor to my boy Duncan? He’s a weakly lad, always ailing, and our local doctor and I are continually at loggerheads, which makes his attendance at Hopeton very unpleasant for all parties. You can look on it pretty much in the light of a holiday. You’ll be seeing the country, which is the finest in the world, and you’ll get some good shooting and fishing, if you’ve a taste that way. As to terms—well, we can settle them easily enough if the plan pleases you.”

The offer was so sudden and unexpected that for the moment I was not ready with an answer. I looked round at Marigold, hoping to see in her eyes a look of encouragement, which would have decided my course in a moment. But it was an expression of anxiety—even of fear—that I saw written across her face, and as I looked her eyes met mine, and she shook her head almost imperceptibly, as though in warning.

What should I do and say? I felt tempted to accept out of hand, to secure the continuance of the pleasant friendship that had sprung up during the past few days. I felt that I ought to refuse, in answer to the



unspoken petition in Marigold's eyes. In the end I temporised.

"Your offer is so unexpected, Mr Tanish," I said hesitatingly, "that I should like a few hours to consider it. Will you give me until after dinner to-night to make up my mind?"

"Certainly, my lad. There is no hurry. I must confess that one reason why I would like you at Hopeton is that I'd get a chance to pull up on you at chess."

"Ah! You would soon do that," I said laughingly. "You are very little behind me now."

The conversation I have recorded took place soon after lunch, so I had some hours to consider my decision. I determined that I would take the opportunity to talk to Marigold alone, and get her advice; but it seemed that she was aware of my intention and took precautions to prevent my success. All afternoon she remained by her father's side. At tea I heard her deep in a discussion on babies with a middle-aged matron, whom she usually avoided, and soon after she retired to her cabin and did not reappear until the dinner-gong had sounded.

I suppose this obvious avoidance of me was an important factor in my decision, for man

is a pig-headed animal. I know that by the time dinner was over I felt I had a grievance against Marigold Tanish, and that I had determined to act against her unspoken wish.

When the Squire — as Morgan always called him—came to the smoking-room I was ready with my answer.

“Well, Seaton,” he greeted me, “have you had time to make up your mind?”

“I have decided to accept your offer, Mr Tanish, subject to our agreeing on terms.”

“Good, good!” he replied, rubbing his hands gleefully. “We’ll have many a fight over the chess-board yet,” and with that we fell to discussing my salary and the conditions of my service, matters which were easily settled, as Tanish’s offer was much above what I was quite ready to accept.

I did not see Marigold till next day—our last aboard ship. When I went on deck before breakfast I found her taking her usual walk, and, as usual, I joined her.

“I hear you have decided to come to Hopeton,” she said, after the usual morning greetings.

“Yes,” I replied; “I hope that my decision is agreeable to you.”

“I am sorry,” said Marigold in a hesitating voice. “Ours is not a happy home, and I

am afraid you may yet have reason to regret that you accepted my father's offer."

"I hope you may be wrong, Miss Tanish," I answered, somewhat embarrassed by the turn of the conversation. "If I might venture to hope that my coming would tend to make your home happier in any way——"

"No, no!" she interrupted. "It will only lead to greater trouble."

"Then why would you not give me a chance of speaking to you yesterday?" I could not help saying. "You could have warned me then."

"I did not feel that I had the right to ask you to refuse. I ought not to speak as I am doing now. I have no *reason* to believe that you will be unhappy with us—but I *feel* it. Please forget what I have said, Mr Seaton. I am very foolish at times, and inclined, like many Scotch people, to believe in presentiments when I may only be suffering from indigestion."

She changed into a lighter vein, and we talked nonsense until it was time to go to breakfast, but I could see plainly enough that on Marigold's part it was done with an effort.

I had a further talk with Squire Tanish in the course of the day. He was anxious that

I should travel up to Scotland with his daughter and himself, and take over my duties at once, but I had one or two business matters to attend to in London in connection with my finances, besides which I wanted to see the world's greatest city now that I had crossed the Atlantic.

We arranged, therefore, that I should come north in two weeks, for I fancied I should have had enough sight-seeing in that time. My new employer gave me full instructions as to which line to travel by, where to change, and so on, and showed the most marked anxiety that I should not fail him.

When I went below to finish my packing, Jabez Morgan was in the act of locking his trunk.

"Well, Mr Seaton," said he, smiling up at me from the floor, "I guess we've got to part company now. You'll be able to sleep behind an unlocked door to-night."

"That will be a considerable satisfaction to me," I agreed.

"I'm real sorry if I've put you out with my finicking ways," Morgan went on, with apparent earnestness. "I'm afraid you still look on me with suspicion, but I assure you that I am perfectly straight. Circumstances have been against me here, and I have been

made to seem a crook. Well, well, Seaton, it don't much matter after all. I guess we've done with one another after to-day. Likewise, I guess you won't waste much grief over me, though you may on your friends the Tanishes."

"I don't need to waste any grief over them," I told him. "I am going north to stay with them in a couple of weeks."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Morgan, obviously upset by the news. "Dear, dear, dear! Going to visit Marigold Tanish, are you? Some folks get all the lavish!"

"I am going to act as tutor and doctor to the youngest son," I explained.

"Ay, ay! The same thing in the end, Seaton. So we shall meet again after all!"

"How do you mean—meet again?" I said with surprise. "Surely you have not been invited to Hopeton? From all I have seen and heard you are hardly a favourite with the family."

"Unfortunately, no. Nevertheless, we shall meet again, Seaton, which makes my remarks on my character more important than I thought. I tell you again I'm straight enough, and you may find it worth while to trust me some day."

"Look here, Morgan, do you want me to



keep what you have told me secret—about you coming north, I mean?”

“Don’t you worry about that. They know it, sure enough. The Squire maybe ain’t enthusing much over it, but he reckons on seeing me. As for Miss Marigold—well, you know what I think of her, Seaton. Maybe you don’t think much of my chance, but I’m a hopeful josser myself, and I’m a hog on patience.”

He beamed cheerfully at me through his spectacles in the bland way that had baffled me throughout our intercourse, and I felt as far off as ever from knowing whether he was a rogue or a simpleton. Yet for a moment the picture of him rose before me as I had seen him that night without spectacles, and the resolute face that looked into mine was not that of a fool, but of a man to be . . . respected.

As he was leaving the cabin he turned back, as though a thought had struck him.

“By the way, Seaton,” he said, “if ever you should want to annoy the Squire beyond belief—just you tell him to *follow the little pictures!*”

Before I could ask for an explanation, he was gone.



## CHAPTER VI.

MY fortnight in London passed very agreeably. I saw all the sights, visited most of the theatres, and dined at many of the more expensive restaurants. Sight-seeing, however, soon grows wearisome, and I was not sorry when the time arrived for me to journey north.

I travelled from St Pancras, by Mr Tanish's instructions, as the Midland is the only line which touches Kilmarnock, my junction for Kilbrennan. This last part of the journey, after leaving the express, was a gorgeous revelation to me. The local train followed the Ayrshire coast-line along the Firth of Clyde, and I looked out of the carriage window at the grandeur of the Arran hills with the April sun low behind the northern end of the island. Farther south towards the open sea, I could distinguish the solitary outline of Ailsa Craig hazily in the evening mist, posted there like some stern guardian

of the great waterway. And all before me stretched the Firth, its waters of a depth and purity of blue that I had believed was only to be seen in the Mediterranean.

It was about half-past six when I alighted on the platform at the little station of Kilbrennan. I had not warned the Tanishes of my arrival, for it had struck me that as I was going to Hopeton in the capacity of tutor, it might be well not to presume upon the reception accorded to a guest. I had expected that I would be able to get a cab at the station, that would carry both me and my belongings to my destination.

But the solitary porter was struck garrulous at the idea of a cab being at the station merely on speculation.

"Cab? Ha'e ye orrderred the cab, for if ye did it's no here?"

I explained meekly that I had not ordered a cab, but expected to find one, if not several, in waiting.

"It's easy seen ye're no' used to this pairish, or ye wudna expec' to fin' Rab Wulson yokin' his auld mare on spec. Whaur wis ye wantin' to gang?"

I should explain that, to judge from his rough harsh speech, one would have thought this porter had a most violent grudge against

me. It only dawned upon me slowly that he was, according to his lights, quite civil and helpful, though he obviously looked upon me as a poor creature—a Southron.

I told him that I wanted to go to Hopeton.

“Hopeton, is’t?” he answered. “Does the Laird ken ye’re comin’, for if he kens, what wye did he no’ sen’ the gig tae meet ye?”

“He doesn’t know that I intended coming by this train, though he expects me any day now,” I replied, somewhat nettled by this cross-examination.

“Ye wud ha’e dune better tae wire. Ye’d ha’e saved yersel’ a heap o’ fash—an’ me tae, for that maitter. What’ll ye dae noo?”

“How far is it to Hopeton?” I asked.

“It’s ower five mile if ye gang by the turnpike, but no’ muckle mair nor three by the auld Roman Road ower the hills—that’s if ye’re thinkin’ o’ walkin’. But ye couldna tak’ ony o’ thae muckle boaxes wi’ ye. The cairrier wud tak’ them ower on the railway lorry.”

“I think that’s the best way, then,” I agreed. “It’s a lovely evening, and the walk will do me good after a day cramped up in the train.”

“Oo’ ay, it’s a braw nicht,” he admitted, grudgingly to all appearances. “An’ ye’ll juist ha’e time to gang that far afore the gloamin’s on tap o’ ye.”

With that he proceeded to instruct me upon my route, but what with the strangeness of his dialect and my own rather casual attention to his directions, I went off with but a hazy notion of how I was to reach my destination.

At first, all was clear. Behind the station rose a steep grassy hill, its base clad in trees, amidst which one could see the chimneys and roofs of two or three houses peeping out. My road led me upwards through this wooded zone to a bare whitewashed farmhouse which lay at the foot of the hill proper. Here I thought it wise to refresh my memory as to my direction.

“Hopeton?” replied the strapping red-armed girl whom I found by the byre-door. “Oo ay. Ye can gang this wye, but it’s a gye rough road. Turn roond tae the left when ye’re bye the fairm, an’ keep straucht on roond the side o’ the hill. The dry-stane dykes ’ll keep ye richt. Keep atween them an’ ye canna gae wrang.”

Having thanked the girl for her courtesy,

and received in reply a hearty laugh and a "Havers, man, it's naething!"—I went on my way round the side of the hill.

So this was the old Roman Road!

On either side of me was an ancient dry-stone dyke, broken down by time and sheep into a mere clutter of loose stones. Between lay a deep irregular hollow, filled up with bracken and gnarled gorse. A semblance of a path led through this wilderness, kept open by passing shepherds and—as I learnt afterwards—quarrymen wending their way to their work across the hills.

I was enchanted with the scene beneath me. The road winding round the side of the grassy hill which rose four or five hundred feet above my head, was itself a couple of hundred feet above the waters of the Firth. When I stood by the broken wall and looked down, I saw the blue waters stretched before me, with islands large and small laid out as on a map. I did not know them then as I do now, but there were the two Cumbraes, Big and Little, the Isle of Bute, and, most wonderful of all, Arran, with the sun just set behind the northern end. The whole sky was rich with colour, but on the water the shadows were lengthening each moment, and a gloom be-



gan to settle on the land, which made me shiver and hastily pass on my way.

As I proceeded my path became steadily worse. I left the first hill behind, and found myself in the midst of a country dotted with grass-clad knolls, topped with rude cairns of stones. My track kept me well above the level of cultivation.

When I had walked for the best part of an hour I began to have doubts as to my direction. My friend the railway porter had put it at three miles, and I felt sure that I must have walked quite that distance. Dusk was thickening on me too, and there was no sign of human habitation at which I could inquire my way.

I now found myself in a high valley between two small hills set close together. My twin-guides, the dykes, had dwindled to one, so that I was no longer assured that I was still on the old Roman Road. Worse still, when I passed these gloomy knolls on which night had already begun to settle, I found in front of me a great dark wood of stunted firs and pines, at which my path forked, one branch leading by a stile through the wood, the other bearing away to the left.

I stopped and scratched my head. The

porter had certainly mentioned this wood—the “foax-cover” he had called it—but whether he had bidden me go through it or avoid it was beyond my capacity to remember.

Giving the problem up in despair I tossed for it, and bore off on the path to the left, avoiding the wood. It had now grown so dark that it was with difficulty that I could see the path, though, looking over the countryside, I could still follow the contours of the hills, and distinguish the black masses that represented wooded tracks.

I suppose I must have walked about a mile from the fork in the way, when I saw, in the distance, a light, which I took to be shining from some dwelling-house, possibly Hopeton. Unfortunately the path I followed was leading me away at right angles to this light, to reach which I must leave the track and take to the pasture-land that stretched beneath me.

“Anyhow,” I thought, “a cross-country tramp can be little worse than this,”—for, indeed, the path was now almost indiscernible, and I was continually coming into unpleasant contact with whin-bushes, or stumbling over loose boulders which had fallen from the dyke.

The light which I had made up my mind to aim for lay across a valley between two hills, and was a fair way up on the opposite slope. I clambered over the dyke amid a rattle of loose stones, and set off downhill at a good pace, and at considerable risk of a broken ankle, for the close-cropped turf was honeycombed with rabbit-holes and full of ridges and irregularities of surface.

It was now all but night, and but for the fact that the moon had appeared round the shoulder of the nearest hill, I should have been unable to advance with any hope of reaching my goal. To add to my troubles, the light for which I was aiming suddenly disappeared. Once or twice again I caught a glimpse of it, and then it was gone for good.

Immediately after I had lost sight of the light, the report of a shot-gun reached my ears from somewhere in the gloom ahead. At the same time I thought I could hear a faint distant call of distress, and then once more the silence fell around me.

I stood still and listened intently, but as I heard nothing further, I put the sound down as the startled call of some bird disturbed by the shot.

Then, by the aid of the moonlight, I saw the explanation of the disappearance of the

light for which I was aiming. Ahead of me lay a long narrow wood, which appeared to me as a black stripe stretching away far up the hill towards which I was advancing. As I descended the slope into the valley, this wood had come between me and the light.

I could see that I must either make a very long detour, or else cut right through the wood—no easy job in the darkness. However, as I had no idea how far I might have to walk to get round it, I determined that I would go through, if the undergrowth were not too thick.

I reached the bottom of the valley and stumbled into a little burn that flowed through it. Crossing this, I advanced uphill once more, still over springy, close grass, and each moment I seemed to get nearer to the wood. So quickly did it draw near that it almost seemed to be coming to meet me, and as it came I liked it less and less.

There was something horrid about that wood. All around me, I could see the rough outline of the country by the bright light of the moon, but there ahead the moon's rays had no power. The wood was like a great black wall stretched across my track. Its gloom and silence began to have an eerie effect upon me, so much so that as I reached

the dyke that bordered the wood I began to hesitate, and wonder if perhaps it would not be wiser to make the detour after all.

Then I pulled myself together and called myself a nervous fool, afraid of the dark. Giving myself no further time for hesitation, I clambered over the wall and dived down into the darkness.

Immediately the whole wood became a pandemonium of sound. For a moment my heart jumped within me in sudden fear ; and then I realised that in the tree-tops were the nests of innumerable wood-pigeons, whose rest I had disturbed, and the harsh clatter of whose wings had startled me.

I pushed my way forward, stung and pricked by the sharp pine-needles, which to my high-strung nerves seemed like the swords of dumb sentinels barring my advance. As I struggled I became conscious of another sound, so distinct that it pierced even the thunderous flapping overhead.

It was a low moaning wail, as of some creature in awful pain or stricken by unutterable sorrow—a sound that, coming to me raw-nerved as I was, brought a cold sweat to my brow and set my limbs a-tremble.

I stumbled on, guarding my head from injury with outstretched arms, and jarring



my whole body from time to time as I collided with the trunks of trees. Already it was hopeless to turn back. My sense of direction had deserted me, and there was nothing for it but to struggle on, in the hope that I would blunder out on the opposite side.

As I penetrated farther the trees seemed to grow wider apart, and patches of moonlight lay here and there, like white sheets spread upon the ground. A clear light shone some way ahead as though an open space lay there, wherein the moonlight could play freely.

But from that direction, too, seemed to come the ever-repeated wail that struck unmanly fear into my heart. I all but turned and fled back into the thicket. Shame drove me forward, however, and soon I had stumbled upon the verge of a small clearing, brilliantly lit by the cold hard light of the moon.

It was here that I found the source of the weird sad cries that had upset my nerves.

In the middle of the clearing stood a rough cairn of stones, clean-cut in the moonlight. Seated at the base of this cairn was a young man, on whose face there was a look of grief and despair indescribable in words.

Across his knees and supported by his twined arms lay the form of a white-clad

woman, from whose closed eyes and set features life appeared to have fled. A great dark stain spread over the bosom of her white dress. Her dark hair hung loose over the arm of the youth who held her.

At first I thought the young man had heard my approach, but his eyes, which looked in my direction, were fixed on vacancy, and as I looked his lips parted, and there burst from them again that low long wail.

## CHAPTER VII.

How long I stood silently looking on this strange scene I cannot say. I might have stood much longer than I did but for a discovery that I made without at first realising its significance. As the young man sat motionless with the body of the woman in his arms, I became conscious of the faint regular rise and fall of her bosom. Everything stood out so clearly in the moonlight that I could not be mistaken. So still and white was her face that I had assumed that life had fled, and the discovery of my mistake came on me so suddenly that I rushed forward, shouting—

“She is alive! She is alive!”

The young man started to his feet, still clasping her to his breast, and I saw his eyes gradually focus upon me, and marked the look of surprise with which he slowly realised my presence.

“Who are you? . . . What do you want here?” he demanded, but in a hoarse

whisper, as if afraid of disturbing her whom he carried.

"Don't ask questions," I answered hurriedly. "I am a doctor, and the lady is hurt—but alive."

"She is shot through the heart!" he murmured. "Oh, God!" And again his cry of anguish filled the air.

"Pull yourself together, man," I said abruptly, and seizing his shoulder I shook him roughly. "She is alive! Do you hear? She is alive! Let me see the wound."

I took the woman from his arms and laid her upon the ground. Quickly I opened up the bosom of her dress and found upon her breast, just over the heart, a long raw flesh wound. A short examination convinced me that it was that, and nothing more. She had merely fainted from loss of blood and from shock.

Springing to my feet I tried to convey this good news to the young man, who had stood by meanwhile with a dazed look on his face.

"She is all right!" I explained. "It is merely a flesh wound. Where can we take her in order that I may dress it properly? Have you a home near by?"

Gradually a look of comprehension dawned on his face.

"She is alive? Oh, Marie! Thank God!"

He threw himself on the ground beside her and kissed her eyes, her lips, and her hair, and dropped tears upon her upturned face.

"Come, come!" I said sternly. "This won't do at all. Pull yourself together, man, and let us get a roof over the lady."

"Yes, yes," he stammered brokenly. "You are right. It is not far."

He lifted her tenderly in his arms, and making a sign to me to follow, plunged apparently into the depths of the wood. In reality he followed a narrow track which soon led us to a gate in the boundary wall. Not far ahead, across a field, I saw a light shining from the window of a farmhouse. Towards this my guide carried his burden, and soon after we had the injured woman lying upon a couch in a comfortable room, and I was busily at work dressing her wound.

I had hardly finished when she opened her eyes and looked vacantly round until she encountered the gaze of the youth, who was watching her eagerly.

"Roy," she murmured faintly, and closed her eyes again.



"Marie, my darling ! Thank God you are alive !"

He was on his knees by her side, holding her pale face between his hands.

"Let her rest," I intervened with professional bluntness. "She will do better if left undisturbed."

He rose obediently at my word.

"Now," I continued. "What is the meaning of all this ? Did your gun go off by accident ?"

The young man shook his head.

"I had no gun," he said, looking me straight in the face. "I was not there. I heard a shot in the wood—a cry of pain from my wife—and I rushed to her assistance. I was here in the farm. When I found her she lay at the foot of the cairn. I thought she was dead. That is all—except that—whoever you are—I thank you for what you have done. Perhaps Marie can explain."

"No, no," I said hurriedly. "She must not be worried to-night. You must get her to bed as quickly as you can ; but first, perhaps, you can direct me to Hopeton, for I have lost my way."

"Hopeton !" The young man started back, a wild look of anger in his eyes. "Do

you come from there? Are you a spy then, after all?"

I shook my head, wondering at his sudden excitement.

"I have never been to Hopeton in my life," I answered quietly. "I have lost my way through trying to take a short cut from Kilbrennan."

He looked at me intently, but evidently reading the truth of my words in my face, he calmed down once more.

"I will guide you to Hopeton," he said, after a moment's thought. "First let me get my wife safely to bed and then I shall be ready."

I examined my patient once more, and found her conscious but weak. Her husband carried her off to an upper room, leaving me alone to await his return.

I had now time to observe my surroundings, and was surprised to find the furnishings and decoration of the room vastly superior to what one would expect in the sitting-room of a small farmhouse. There were many evidences of taste and of education upon the walls, and in the books and music which lay upon a side-table.

I had time also to search my memory for something that had so far escaped me. Of

whom did this young man remind me ? There was something distinctly familiar about his face, though I could swear I had never seen him before.

I was still puzzling over this resemblance, when my attention was distracted by a crumpled and blood-stained paper which lay on the floor near the couch. I remembered then that in dressing my patient's wound I had found this paper concealed in the bosom of her dress.

I picked it from the floor and straightened it out. The paper was yellow with age and worn and frayed where it had been folded. In wiping away the blood with which it was stained, the name *Tanish* caught my eye, and I found myself looking at the context before I realised that my action was dishonourable.

I did not learn much from my spying, however. The writing was not English, nor any other language that I knew anything of. It bore most resemblance to German, and I surmised that it was written probably in one of the Scandinavian tongues with which I was unfamiliar. The hand was cramped and antique, and I guessed that it must be one or two centuries old.

I was standing with this document in my

hand when my host returned. I apologised for my prying, and explained it as best I could. He took the paper and examined it closely.

"You say my wife was wearing this inside her dress?" he asked with surprise.

I nodded in reply.

"Strange!" he murmured. "I can make nothing of it. I have never seen it before."

"Your wife is not Scottish?" I hazarded.

"No, Belgian," he replied shortly, as though he resented my curiosity.

"Ah! Then I have it! The paper is in Flemish," I exclaimed.

"Perhaps you are right," he answered coldly, "but it is no business of ours. I shall return the paper to my wife to-morrow. Are you ready to go, or can I offer you any refreshment?"

I thanked him, but declined. I was already very late, and as my luggage had probably arrived at Hopeton, they would no doubt be wondering what had become of me.

We set out at a good round pace. My guide declined to converse, answering my tentative remarks with monosyllables, and being obviously anxious to be rid of me. After quarter of an hour's tramp I recog-

nised that I was back at the fox-cover where the path had forked. It was obviously here that I had gone astray. My companion led me down the other fork, through the fox-cover, and when we were through the wood we crossed a stile which brought us out on a proper road.

"This is the highway from Kilbrennan," explained my guide. "You are now almost at your destination."

He led me a little way along the road and then stopped.

"Here is the carriage-drive to Hopeton," he said, pointing to an opening in the hedge. "It is about quarter of a mile long. I need not take you further, as you cannot make a mistake."

"Thank you. Will you tell me your name?" I asked. "I shall return to dress your wife's wound, but I am sure I can never find my way unless I have your name as a guide."

"You are very kind," replied the young man. "But it is unnecessary, or if it should be necessary there is the village doctor—he is my friend. I should like . . . to ask—" he stammered and hesitated, "though I have no right to do so—that you say nothing of your experience of to-night to—at



Hopeton. You see, I . . . I am a—a tenant, and it might do me harm."

The moon shone full in his face, and he smiled at me as he preferred his request. In a moment I knew of whom I had been reminded.

I hesitated to grant his wish, but it is difficult to refuse when one has not a ready reason, so finally I gave a qualified consent.

"Provided I hear nothing that makes this affair appear more serious than it does at present, I shall say nothing," I agreed.

"Thank you—good-night!" And turning on his heel he left me before I had time to say all that I meant.

There was nothing for it but to make the best of my way to Hopeton. As I strode up the long dark avenue I murmured to myself—

"A pair of spectacles, and that is the face of Jabez Morgan."

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was dark in the drive, for it was fringed with oak and chestnut trees through which the light of the moon did not penetrate. In little more than five minutes I saw ahead of me the lights of Hopeton, and breathed a sigh of relief to think that I had at last reached my destination, and that my troubles were over for the day.

In this assumption I was premature, as will be seen.

As I approached the front of the house I became aware that a vehicle of some kind was standing at the door, for I heard the rattle of harness and the pawing of a horse on the gravel, and saw the light of what I guessed to be a carriage lamp.

At the same moment I heard the door open and the voice of my new employer raised in anger. I could see him by the light from the hall, holding open the door so that some one might pass out.

“And mind this, Forbes,” he was saying as I came within hearing, “I’m showing you the back of the door for the last time. The boy will have his own doctor from now on, and we’ll see what’s the matter with him at last.”

As he spoke, another figure appeared upon the broad stone step. It was that of a burly man, rather under medium height, with a ruddy healthy face and open honest expression. He might have been somewhere in the fifties, but as he was clean-shaven and upright he looked younger. In one hand he held a stout stick, and in the other an old-fashioned high felt hat. As he came out of the house he paused on the step, and turned to reply to Tanish. Though obviously an educated man, he used the Scottish idiom freely, speaking in a quiet dignified manner very different from the harsh uncontrolled anger of the other.

“Weel, Laird, you ken your ain affairs best. But as for the bairn, if you dinna ken his complaint, it’s no’ for want o’ telling. The puir laddie was getting on fine while you were awa’, but you’re no’ twa weeks back before he breaks doon again. And why? Because o’ the de’il’s temper that maisters you. He’s a sensitive bairn,

an' when you roar and bellow at him as if he were a dug or a stoat, he canna eat nor sleep, let alane haud his ain end up when he's in your company. You may get doon the whole College o' Physeecians, but you'll no' get a truer diagnosis."

I could see, even in the dim light of the doorway, that Tanish was fuming with rage, and I felt that I had timed my arrival most unfortunately. I thought it wiser to stop where I was, hoping that the doctor would drive off immediately. But Tanish would not let him go. His rage must first have vent.

"By God, Forbes," he bellowed, "you are a cunning rogue—cunning enough at least to find an excuse for your own incompetence. So *I* am responsible for the boy's illnesses, am I? Why, damn you, man, it's the filthy drugs you pour into his guts that ruin his health. But that is what you're after! I know you, and the whole tribe of your smug, canting, rule-o'-thumb country doctors. You can blunder through a confinement, or you can tell whooping-cough from measles, but for all the good you do to either of them, folk might as well call in the vet. It's *fees* you're after. So long as you can run up

your bill by the ell, God help the poor patient."

The doctor listened gravely to this violent abuse.

"Aweel, Laird," he said quietly when the other halted for breath, "hard words break nae banes." Then looking back into the hall, he cried, "Come awa', Betty. It's time we were hame."

"Yes, and let it be the last time you cross this threshold," Tanish began once more. "Ay, and your daughter too. I'll have no spying into the methods of the new doctor under cover of visiting Marigold. Marigold needs no friend whose father is an incompetent, drug-muddling charlatan."

"Guid kens, Laird Tanish, it's nae pleasure tae visit the Big Hoose these days, but there's sich a thing as medical etiquette, and I maun hand ower the case dacently and in orrder. Sae ye'll hae tae bear wi' me for yin mair veesit, Laird."

"Hand over the case be damned!" retorted Tanish. "The case is out of your hands now. Seaton is due here at any moment, and he wants none of your grandmotherly advice."

But this I could not listen to in silence.



I would not be less correct, professionally speaking, than the manly old village doctor. I felt that it was time to disclose myself, so I walked forward into the light.

"Ah! Here he is! The very man!" explained Tanish exultingly, drawing me forward and shaking me warmly by the hand. "You can take leave of the case now, Forbes. There will be no excuse for another visit and another six-and-eightpence in the bill."

"I am afraid, Mr Tanish," I said firmly, "that I must have a consultation with Dr Forbes before I take over your son's case. If you will permit me, sir," I continued, turning to the doctor, "I shall call upon you to-morrow at a convenient hour. You will then be spared the trouble of coming here, and we shall be able to go into the details of the case at our ease."

Dr Forbes received this statement with grave professional dignity, but I felt by the look he gave me that he appreciated my motive.

"Thank you, Dr Seaton," he replied. "Drap in the morn aboot three or fower, and you shall ha'e my opeenion o' the bairn and his ailments. Come alang, Betty. The mare's wearied waiting on us."

I now saw Betty Forbes for the first time. She had been standing with Marigold Tanish in the great hall, while the two men were quarrelling in the doorway. She came forward now to join her father, and as she passed Tanish she stopped and looked at him, with a fire of anger in her big red-brown eyes. In the dim light of the lamps I could not tell her beauty, but I saw that she was tall and straight and well-formed.

"I have heard all you had got to say to my father, Laird," she said, and her rich voice trembled with the anger that she held in control. "He is too big a man to answer you in the same childish way. Why, bless you, when you let loose your petty spite on him you are like a vicious cur barking at the tail of an automobile for all the effect you have—good-night."

She turned to go, and in passing gave a long searching look at me, as if she were attempting in a glance to sum up not only my appearance, but my whole character and history.

"Come along, Daddy," she said, and the affectionate tone of her voice must have compensated the doctor for all the hard words he had borne. She sprang lightly into the

box-seat of the dog-cart and took the reins, while her father climbed up more stiffly on the other side.

“Then we’ll see you the morn about three, Dr Seaton,” he cried, as they drove off into the darkness.

Mine was a very strained and uncomfortable welcome to Hopeton. The Laird himself was in a transition state between fury and civility, which rendered his conversation stilted and unnatural, besides which he must have been more or less annoyed with me for siding, however mildly, with his enemy.

It was when I turned to greet Marigold, however, that I had the greatest shock of this surprising evening. So greatly was she changed that I could hardly believe it was she, and not some invalid sister. Her beautiful cheeks were pale and sunken, and her dark eyes seemed unnaturally large and brilliant. If ever eyes spoke, Marigold Tanish’s cried fear that night. There was something further in her expression that I could not fathom, as if she was trying to speak to me personally and warn me—but of what ?

Even her voice, as she welcomed me, seemed altered in some subtle way. There was little

in it of the music that had pleased me so much on board the *Sphinx*.

"Wherever have you been to?" demanded the Laird when the usual greetings had been got over. "Your traps have been here this hour back, and we had begun to think that you had stayed the night at Kilbrennan."

"I got lost," I said with a laugh. "I was directed by a short cut over the hills, and I wandered about aimlessly until a farm-hand, or some such person, shepherded me back into my way."

"Well, you must be hungry. Marigold, show the doctor his room, and where he can get a wash, and let's get to supper."

It was a gloomy house, panelled in dark oak that reflected little of the light of the oil-lamps. Taking a candle in either hand from a table in the hall, Marigold led me up the wide staircase and along a dark corridor. When she reached the door of what was to be my bedroom she did not stop to let me pass in, but preceded me into the room, and then, turning upon me suddenly, with her strange wild eyes reflecting the flickering flames of the candles, she whispered—

"I must warn you! Make no mention of my brother. Do not ask where he is, or

show that you have any knowledge that Roy exists. I have not time to explain now, but please be very careful. The mere mention of Roy throws him into a rage."

She left me without awaiting an answer, and I felt pleased to think that she trusted me to that extent.

Supper was a gloomy meal. Marigold hardly spoke, and I was compelled to carry on a conversation with Laird Tanish, with whom, after what I had seen and heard that evening, I did not feel at all comfortable. We talked mainly of the little boy, Duncan, whom I had not yet seen.

According to the account given me by his father, there was little the matter with him.

"You'll see him for yourself to-morrow," he said. "In my opinion it is stubbornness, more than anything else, that's wrong with him. He won't eat—but just plays with his food, and no amount of talking will influence him. I've thrashed the young mule until he howled—time and again—but there seems to be no way of getting the better of him."

I looked across at Marigold as her father gave me this view of the upbringing of a delicate child, but she kept her eyes lowered and refused to meet mine.



I could foresee plainly enough that my position in this strange household was going to be a difficult one. The father was an autocrat, and, in addition, a man of uncontrolled passion. How far would I dare to run counter to his will without bringing things to such a crisis that I must either leave or be dismissed. Certainly, from a merely commercial point of view, I did not care how soon I lost my employment; but having accepted Tanish's offer, I felt that my pride was involved in the satisfactory fulfilment of my duties.

"I suppose it's too late for chess to-night," said Tanish doubtfully, looking at his watch when supper was over.

"I am afraid I am too tired and sleepy to do myself justice," I replied. "If you will excuse me, I shall go early to bed."

I heaved an immense sigh of relief when I was at last alone in the security of my bedroom and free to recall the incidents of the evening. My mind was in a perfect muddle with all that I had seen and heard, and I sat down on the edge of my bed to try to straighten things out.

Who was this mysterious young man whom I had stumbled upon in the wood? As she recovered consciousness his wife had

called him Roy, and Roy was the name of Tanish's son—and this son must not be mentioned in his presence under pain of an outburst of rage !

But the young man of the wood certainly bore an extraordinary resemblance to Jabez Morgan—a fact that I could not reconcile with the former being Roy Tanish.

There was something, too, that was very strange in the wounding of that beautiful girl. Was it an accident? I felt certain that her husband had spoken the truth, and that he was as ignorant as myself of the facts. This, again, reminded me of the paper that I had taken from her bosom—the paper upon which I had read the name Tanish.

Altogether, the more I recalled the events of the evening, the more muddled did I become; nor was my condition improved by a gentle tap upon my door, followed immediately after by the appearance of a slip of paper which was pushed underneath from without.

I picked it up and read it by the dim light of my candle.

“I must see you to-night. Wait until

you hear a second tap upon your door. You will then find me in the corridor, and I shall guide you to where we can talk safely.

M. T."

So I was not yet through with the night's adventures.

## CHAPTER IX.

I WAITED nearly an hour before the expected summons came. By that time all sound had died down in the house, and one could safely assume that every one had retired for the night. Then the signal was given, and I slipped noiselessly out into the corridor. I could see nothing, but a small hand took mine, and I was led along in the darkness to a sitting-room lit by a single candle.

Marigold Tanish turned and faced me.

"Forgive me for asking you to meet me in this surreptitious way," she said in a low voice. "It seemed the only thing to do. You must be told something of how we are situated here, or you may say things to my father which will start all our troubles afresh. So I asked you to meet me now, because it might be days before I found an opportunity to talk to you alone. I hope you don't mind, and that you don't think it . . . indiscreet . . . of me to meet you in this way?"

"I think I know you well enough, Miss Tanish, to have the utmost confidence in your discretion. It is enough for me that you think it necessary to speak to me alone. I should also like to say, before you tell me anything, that whatever I can do to help you will be done with my whole heart."

"Thank you. I must say what has to be said as quickly as possible and bring this unconventional interview to a close. My father, as you saw even on board the *Sphinx*, is a very hot-tempered man, and it has always been found best to avoid irritating him as much as possible. When we arrived home from America, he found that all his plans for the future had been upset.

"About a year ago my father engaged a girl of about my age as a governess for Duncan, and also to some extent as a companion to me. She was a Belgian girl of good family, an orphan, who had been compelled to come out into the world to earn her living. She was very good-looking and very clever in her conversation, but I must admit that I never cared for her very much, and that for all the time she was here we were never more than mere acquaintances.

"It was different, however, with my father and with my brother Roy. Marie seemed to



fascinate them both, and yet she was so clever that for some time she was able to prevent them from getting at loggerheads. Roy, you must know, is just about as hot-headed as his father, and both of them are very very obstinate. Perhaps," she added with a wan smile, "as it is a family trait, I am not entirely free from it myself.

"There were many old family papers which at that time my father was very much interested in, and he used to have Marie help him sort them over and arrange them. He had some idea, I think, of writing a history of the family. We go back a long time, you know, and in the days of the Jacobites we were hot and strong for the Stewarts.

"There was a lot of correspondence dating back to that time, some of it in French, and Marie used to translate these letters and make fair copies of them. There was also an old illegible scrawl which was written in Flemish, and this also Marie managed to decipher and translate.

"The secret of that document is not mine to disclose. It is enough to say that my father became wildly excited over it. It was the cause of our visit to America and the ill-feeling that arose between Mr Morgan and my father.

“ It was about that time that Roy and my father became estranged. Roy had fallen in love with Marie, and he did not take any pains to hide the fact. How far she encouraged him I cannot say, but I think she played a not very honourable part, although one must admit that her position was difficult.

“ My father, although he never directly told me so, had made up his mind that Marie should be his third wife.

“ The climax came one day when father surprised Roy and Marie in the garden. I was never told what happened, but Roy left the house the same day after a dreadful scene with his father. There is a small farm about two miles away which belongs to Roy. It was left to him by our mother, who died when we were children. It happened to be unoccupied at this time, and Roy went off there and started to farm the land. We have both got small incomes of our own, so that he was quite able to support himself.

“ Meanwhile, after a violent quarrel with Marie, father became reconciled to her again, and it was soon afterwards that the discovery of the Flemish document was made. I must not tell you more of that, but it caused us to set out on our trip to America, leaving Marie

at home to look after Duncan. Evidently father intended to be married on his return, or he would not have been so anxious to engage you as Duncan's tutor.

"Our excursion to America did not succeed, and we returned home to find that in our absence Roy and Marie had been married, and were living at Blackdykes—the farm I told you of.

"There was a terrible scene. I was afraid that my father in his rage would have a seizure or lose his reason. Later I feared that there would be bloodshed.

"He had talked so much of Marie on the journey north, and had become so excited and fidgety, that I knew he was looking forward with unusual pleasure to seeing her again.

"We had wired the hour of our arrival, and the car was at the station to meet us. It was a great disappointment to father when he found that Marie had not come with it. He made no remark, however.

"It was when we arrived here, and old Mrs Cunningham, the housekeeper, met us on the doorstep, that he first began to have an idea that something was wrong. The poor woman was in a state of terror. She had never summoned up courage to write

and tell us what had happened, and now her cowardice was recoiling on her own head.

"She stammered her news as best she could, poor thing, and it was then that I thought my father would have a seizure. His rage was terrible. It was evening when we arrived home, and already beginning to get dark, but he rushed out of the house and set out in the direction of Blackdykes as soon as he had collected himself sufficiently to take any action at all.

"I dared not let him go alone. Heaven knew what awful thing would happen when he and Roy met. I ran after him and entreated him to wait until morning—to give himself time to think things over. . . . He—he struck me across the face!"

So far Marigold had told me her story clearly and without emotion, but at this point she broke down and wept softly. I made no attempt to comfort her, but silently awaited her recovery. My feelings towards Laird Tanish would not bear words—certainly not in the presence of his daughter.

"I saw then," continued Marigold, when she had dried her tears and ceased to sob—"I saw then that it was useless to attempt

to dissuade him. I fell behind, but followed at a little distance to Blackdykes. Evidently Roy had been warned of our home-coming and had anticipated trouble, for his house was carefully closed and he himself awaited us by the gate of the farmyard.

"Without a word spoken, my father strode up to him as he sat upon the gate and struck him a blow full on the mouth that knocked him flying into the yard beyond.

"Roy behaved splendidly. I know that he is no coward, for I have seen him do many daring deeds in the years we have spent together, yet when he rose to his feet he made no attempt to return the blow. You must bear in mind that he is almost as hot-headed as his father, and that for him to restrain himself in the face of such a deliberate attack was no ordinary feat.

"He rose up, and wiped away the blood that was trickling from his lip. Father tried to open the gate, but Roy stepped forward and held it shut. I was in terror in case this would bring them to blows again, so I rushed between, and begged them to control themselves.

"Until now, neither had spoken a word, and it was almost with relief that I heard



father begin to denounce Roy in the most terrible terms. There is no need to repeat what he said, even if I could remember it all. Much of it was altogether unreasonable, and all of it was very painful to listen to.

"He cast Roy off for ever, and vowed that he should never enter Hopeton all the days of his life. He spoke of Marie in terms that brought the blood rushing to Roy's face, but still he held himself in, though the knuckles of the hand with which he clutched the gate grew white as he gripped. Oh, it was a horrible scene!

"His language became so dreadful that at last Roy cried harshly to me, 'For God's sake, sis, take him away, or I shall strike him.'

"It would have ended in an actual fight, I am sure, if father had not wrought himself beyond his own endurance, and fallen in a kind of fit. It passed off quickly, but he seemed weak and confused when he came to himself, and offered no resistance when I led him away.

"Next day there was another dreadful scene, for in going through some of his papers he found that the old Flemish document had disappeared. I thought that he would have rushed away again to Black-

dykes to demand its return—for there can be little doubt that Marie had taken it—but strangely enough he acted quite differently. He had severed all connection with his son on the previous day, and he refused to speak to him again, even to demand back his property.

“I don’t think the loss of the paper really matters, because of course we have a translation of it—the copy we took to America—and the information in the paper is too vague to be of much value to Marie. But I am getting upon forbidden ground again.

“Now that I have told you all this, Dr Seaton, you will understand what a sore subject my brother is in this house. From the day on which he missed this paper my father has never referred to his existence, and I am in constant terror in case any chance mention of Roy’s name should cause fresh trouble. My father is still very irritable, and liable to fall into sudden fits of rage, but I am hoping that your coming may calm him to some extent. He has a very high opinion of you, which is founded, strangely enough, upon the fact that you can beat him at chess. He has always been considered a very fine player, and I

cannot remember him ever having met an opponent who could beat him as you do. I am in hopes that your games may take his mind away from all this trouble, for, although he never mentions it, I am sure that he is brooding over it continually.

"Then there is Duncan—I only hope my father will not quarrel with you about him, for you are sure to disagree with his treatment of the poor little chap. Duncan is shy and nervous, but very affectionate, and I am afraid Dr Forbes is right when he says that many of his ailments are caused by his father's harsh treatment of him. It is not wilful cruelty—father would never be deliberately cruel—but his own nature is so different that he does not understand Duncan's shy ways. All this, however, you will see for yourself. I have kept you long enough already, and I have told you sufficient to enable you to avoid anything that would rouse my father's anger."

"You have told me enough to let me see how much you yourself must have gone through during this trying fortnight, Miss Tanish," I said. "You can rest assured of my sympathy. Whatever I can do to help you will be done with my whole heart. I shall humour your father in every way pos-

sible, but Duncan's welfare must be considered too."

"Of course," agreed Marigold. "I hope now that he is to be in your care all the time, that he will soon be quite strong."

"By the way, when I was lost in the dusk this evening I saw some one on the hillside who, I thought, might be Mr Tanish. He was too far off for me to call to him. I think he was carrying a shot-gun. Could it have been your father?"

"Very likely," replied Marigold. "What a pity he did not see you! It would have saved you wandering about in the dark. Father got in just about half an hour before you arrived, and finding that Dr Forbes and his daughter were here, and that your luggage had already come, he immediately got at loggerheads with the Doctor about Duncan. I would not like you to judge him by this evening. It is only when he is put out that he behaves like that, and this evening when he came in he seemed very irritable. He may have had trouble with one of the tenants. Anything like that upsets him very much. But I have kept you up too long. Let me guide you back to your room, and please be as noiseless as possible."

When at last I got into my bed I heaved a sigh of relief, and wondered if I had really finished with the night's doings at last.

I was still wondering when I lost myself in sleep.



## CHAPTER X.

I WAS awake early in the morning, and lay abed meditating on the events of the previous evening.

What a man my new employer must be! I had first come in contact with him while he was denouncing Jabez Morgan as a thief! I had had a struggle with him in the night—there could be no doubt it was he—while he was ransacking Morgan's baggage! I now found good reason to believe that he had shot his son's wife, whom he had himself wanted to marry!

How could I possibly live at peace with such a man? I had heard his language towards the local doctor. I knew that he had struck his eldest son in the mouth, and his daughter across her face, and that he bullied and thrashed an ailing child! How was he likely to treat *me*, if I insisted on having my own way with the boy?

I speculated, too, on the mysterious docu-

ment that was the cause of so much of the trouble in the Tanish family. But for it the trip to America would not have taken place, and consequently Roy and Marie would not have been left to ripen their love affair. But for it I would never have met the Laird and his daughter, nor, I felt sure, Jabez Morgan either.

Morgan, without doubt, had crossed the Atlantic in pursuit of the Tanishes. He possessed something of value to them which he would not give up, and which Tanish had attempted to rob him of that night in our cabin.

I went a step further in my speculations. I had been struck by the resemblance of Roy to Morgan. It must be that the same blood ran in their veins. Morgan must belong to an American branch of the family. He had told me that he had a Scottish ancestor—a Royalist. Yes, I was evidently on the right track.

Finding myself brought up short in my deductions for lack of data, I rose and dressed.

It was a lovely clear spring morning, and the view from my window was magnificent. Although fully three miles from the sea, Hopeton commanded an extensive view of

it. The house was situated at the head and high up the slope of a glen through which a rocky burn flowed to the Firth of Clyde. On each side of the glen rose a range of low hills—those on the left as one faced the sea being the knolls amongst which I had wandered on the previous evening. The hills on the right of the glen were higher and clad in heather instead of grass—a difference which lent a pleasant variety to the landscape. The lower slopes of the valley were wooded, and through the breaks in the trees one saw the clear pools of the burn, and an occasional patch of dull red where the force of the winter stream had eaten its way into the soft sandstone.

One could trace the burn right down the glen to where it spread widely over the pink sands that bordered the blue of the Firth. Away beyond, fourteen miles out on the water, lay the hills of Arran—the ultimate thing in the scene.

As I saw it all for the first time on that bright April morning, it was a glorious spectacle. And the solitude of it all! But for two or three distant splashes of white farm, half hidden in sheltering copses, the hills, the glen, the burn, the very Firth of Clyde and the Arran hills themselves, seemed

arranged and displayed for the sole delectation of Hopeton.

I wandered downstairs and out into the garden, without meeting any one but a couple of clean maids busy with the morning's work. They gave me good-day quietly and with a quick upward glance of the eyes that suggested apprehension—as though every one in this gloomy house was continually expecting an outbreak of rage.

I could now see the house—"the Big Hoose," as the country folk knew it—for the first time. It was built of yellow sandstone that time and weather had painted a sombre grey. No creepers hid its bald outlines, and the cold blue-green slates that roofed it detracted nothing from the inhospitable effect. The house had been built originally as a square—almost a cube—but succeeding generations had added wings on either side, greatly increasing the size, though adding nothing to its architectural beauty.

I must admit that—like most Scottish houses, and like many Scotchmen too—the unattractive exterior was not duplicated within. The cold stone walls and slated roof were built to resist the storms of winter; and inside, even in the most inclement weather, one could be warm and cosy. The decoration

and the furniture were perhaps a trifle heavy, but the large windows let in plenty of light, and the furniture, if old-fashioned, was comfortable.

Given a family of happier temperament, the whole air of Hopeton would have been different.

As things were, a spirit of gloom seemed to overhang the house.

I met my patient and pupil at breakfast. He was a pale puny little chap, small for his age, with the same apprehensive quick look in his eyes that I had noticed in the maids, but in his case greatly accentuated.

He was in obvious terror of his father, and seemed to expect in me a second tyrant. I saw that my first business must be to get rid of this notion and gain his confidence. To the few remarks I made to him during breakfast he replied in startled monosyllables, so I gave it up until I could talk with him alone.

The Laird was in excellent humour, and had I met him then for the first time I should have doubtless put him down as a typical jovial country gentleman.

"I see you've been up and out early having a look at the place," he said to me. "Ah! These are changed days. There was a time when you could have stood on the threshold



of Hopeton and seen nothing but the land of the Tanishes—barring the Arran hills across the Firth. The estate has dwindled and dwindled through successive generations until now we have enough to do to keep the roof over our heads. But we'll maybe change that yet," he concluded with a strange smile.

I thought it curious that he should speak as though he were poverty-stricken, when I knew that he kept a fine car and two or three riding-horses, quite a retinue of servants, and had engaged a private doctor at a very considerable salary. I only learnt later that he was heavily in debt and that his whole estate was mortgaged.

Yet such was the nature of the man that he must have everything as he wanted it, without counting the cost.

I sat on at table with him until Marigold had gone away on some household duty, and the boy Duncan had slipped quietly out. I then took the bull by the horns, as I had made up my mind to do before breakfast. Better a good row at once than a perpetual squabble.

"I want to talk to you about Duncan, Laird Tanish," I began.

"Well, Doctor, what do you think of him?" he replied.

"I have seen too little of him to form anything of an opinion, nor do I wish to until I have had a talk with Doctor Forbes."

His brows lowered at the name, but he merely compressed his lips without uttering a word.

"What I want to be sure of, now," I went on, "is the extent of my control over the boy. Unless I am to have full authority—unless my treatment is to go on without interference from you or any one else—it is useless for me to have anything to do with him."

"What do you mean—interference from me?" said the Laird harshly, with a heightened colour.

"Merely that the boy must not be worried. It must be for me to say what he shall eat and when — what he shall learn — what exercise he shall take,—in fact, I must have absolute authority. A doctor cannot be successful without it."

I looked him full in the eyes as I spoke, and I saw that he understood me, for he bit his lip and drummed his fingers on the table angrily.

Yet he did not flare up in a passion as I had fully expected.

"Well, well," he said after a pause, during

which he had glanced hither and thither uncomfortably, as if he did not care to meet my eyes. "A man should know his own job best. You must have a fair field. I leave the boy to you. About chess, now—when shall we make a start?"

He was obviously anxious to get away from the subject of his son. I guessed that my words had let him see his own behaviour to the boy in a new light. He saw himself, perhaps, as the bully that he really had been.

"This evening, if it is agreeable to you," I replied, equally glad to change the subject, as I had so easily gained my point. "This morning I must spend with Duncan, and in the afternoon I have an appointment with Dr Forbes."

"We'll have a long sitting to-night then," he agreed. "I've been reading up some new openings since I played you last. Maybe I'll turn the tables on you yet."

After I left him I wondered at my easy victory. I began to think that I had some power over him, as Marigold had suggested. If my chess was responsible it would be easy to hold him in leash.

Aboard ship I had not always played my best game. Sometimes I played when I was not in the mood, and once or twice I had

even allowed Laird Tanish to win in order to please him. I felt sure that if I really set my mind to it I could mate him every time. At Harvard I had been reckoned the most promising player for years back, and had never lost a game in a tournament.

If my prestige with my employer depended upon chess, I felt that I was safe.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN the afternoon I walked to Kilbrennan to keep my appointment with Dr Forbes. I took the short cut over the hills, and found my way quite easily by daylight.

As I walked down the farm road above the station, the whole village was laid out before me. It was in a hollow, about two miles from the sea, and comparatively sheltered for the countryside in which it was situated. It was rather a dull-looking village, as they mostly are in Scotland, where the houses are either of cold grey stone or equally unattractive rough-cast.

I wondered as I walked which was the home of Dr Forbes.

"It's easy seen ye're a stranger in Kilbrennan, or ye wudna be speirin' for the Doactor's hoose," said the grocer, whom I accosted in his doorway. "Gang straucht bye a' the shoaps, an' up the brae beyont. Ye'll see twa-three hooses wi' bits o' gairden



forenenst them, an' the yin wi' the ivy a' ower it'll be the Doactor's."

Having thanked my informant, I followed his directions, and had no difficulty in picking out the ivy-clad villa from the others near by. The front garden was gay with tulips and golden wallflower. Hyacinths bloomed in the windows, which were curtained with delicately-bordered casement cloth instead of the stiff lace curtains that shrouded all the other windows in the village.

There was a cheerful bright air about the house that reminded me of what I had seen of England. The smiling maid informed me that the Doctor had been called out unexpectedly, but that Miss Betty awaited me in the "paurler."

At the same moment Miss Betty herself appeared upon the scene—and I was immediately at home.

"Come along, Doctor Seaton. The Dad is out at the moment, and I am commissioned to distract your mind until he comes back. Take a comfy chair. What will you smoke? There are some cigarettes here, but if you prefer a pipe, light up."

I found myself in a cosy sitting-room

scented with spring flowers. The furniture was modern and artistic, the walls a soft plain green and bare but for several landscapes by rising painters of the Glasgow school. A piano stood across one corner, the keyboard open, and a number of sheets of music lay upon the floor. All the chairs were arm-chairs, and all of them looked as comfortable as it is possible for chairs to be.

Meanwhile my hostess continued to talk.

"You have been a great disappointment to me, Doctor Seaton. When we first heard that an American doctor was coming, I pictured an itinerant party in a very shiny silk hat, selling remedies for rheumatics from an orange-box at the village Cross. Naturally I christened you 'Doctor Quack.' Now you have gone and spoilt my picture. I can't call you names after the way you backed up the Dad last night. It was awfully decent of you. By the way, how is our friend the Monster of the Glen to-day? None the worse for his orgie of hate, I hope?"

"Do you mean my employer, Mr Tanish?" I asked, with an attempt at distance, but I am afraid that I smiled back at Betty's merry face. One could not help

it, for it was a pleasure to be in her presence. I had not seen her properly in the shadows of the doorway on the previous evening, and her beauty came as a shock to me.

Great masses of chestnut red hair crowned a face that seemed to me the loveliest I had ever seen. It was so full of life—of humour—and of understanding. Her eyes were large and brown-red, her lips soft and full, and her complexion of that degree of perfection that is only found in conjunction with hair like Betty's—in other words, it was unique.

“Of course I mean the Laird,” she replied, quite unabashed by my attempt to stand by my employer. “I know that you can’t very well bite the hand that feeds you, but he doesn’t feed me, and I simply refuse to be silenced. You needn’t approve—you needn’t even listen unless you like—but you know as well as I do that he is a beast. You heard his remarks to the Dad last night, and you had enough insight to diagnose the Dad’s character for yourself. I could see that by the way you spoke. That is why I am entertaining you instead of letting you study the year-before-last’s ‘Graphic’ in the consulting-room.”

"It is awfully good of you, Miss Forbes," I said truthfully. "Though you make too much of what I said last night. I heard your father speak up for the dignity of our profession, and I felt that I must support him."

"You'll like the Dad. He's a dear. You mustn't think that he is afraid of the Monster of the Glen because he didn't answer him on his own lines. It's simply that the Dad is quite above all that vulgar abuse. It runs off him like water off a duck. He is a philosopher, and altogether much too fine a man to be shut up in a one-eyed hole like Kilbrennan. He would probably be a Harley Street specialist by this time if he hadn't been afflicted with me. You see, my mother died when I was born, and the Dad always insisted on looking after me himself. That is really why he has never got on. I was a miserable little wretch, always having colds and things, and Dad said I must live in country air. Therefore he stuck on here instead of taking chances that were offered to him. But wouldn't *you* like to talk a bit now? I mustn't be greedy."

"I'd much rather listen to you, Miss Forbes," I replied. "It seems ages

since I have met any one who is really cheerful."

"Yes, they are a pretty average gloomy lot up at Hopeton. Even poor Marigold has joined the mourners. I have tried to liven her up, but the Monster objects to me, and makes things as unpleasant as he can when I call. I expect, also, that he takes it out of Marigold after I have gone. Why they should all be so dismal I can't quite make out. Of course every one knows about Roy bolting with his father's intended bride, but that hardly seems enough to give them all the miseries."

"Do you know Roy at all? What sort of a man is he?"

"Know him, bless you! He was the first sweetheart I ever had. We plighted our troth in an apple-tree at Hopeton about fifteen years ago. I admit that I pushed him off the branch soon afterwards, and that he cut his head rather badly by coming down on a rake, but we made it up again later, and for years, off and on—with a goodly number of offs—we were lovers."

"Then you ought to be one of the gloomy ones too," I suggested smilingly.

"I suppose I ought. I'm in the swim



really. As for what Roy is like, he is quite a nice boy—hot-headed and quick—but I am sure he would never do anything mean. After all, he had as much right to marry Duncan's governess as his father had—although why either of them wanted her I have never been able to discover. She is one of those pale tragic-looking girls, and she never looked one straight in the face. I am sorry for poor Roy, for I am sure he is in for lots of trouble. I have done my share now. I want to hear something about you. Why are you not more Amurrican? You haven't reckoned or guessed or calculated or said 'Gee'—not once since you came in!"

I told her something of my past life, and we were still chatting pleasantly when the Doctor came in.

"You ken what a doctor's life is, Dr Seaton," he said as he shook my hand heartily. "He canna call his time his ain, so there's nae need for me tae apologise. Has Betty managed to amuse you wi' her havers?"

"Havers yourself, Dad," his daughter replied as she took his coat and hat and placed him a chair by the fire. "You know perfectly well you like to hear me blether-

ing, and you expect everybody else to like it too. They are not all doting fathers, you know."

"Hoot awa', lassie! You an' your dotin' faithers!" said the old Doctor with a merry smile, as he leant forward to rub his hands in front of the blaze. "Fine ye ken wha's maister in this hoose. Ye daurna stir a finger or gi'e a wag o' your tongue withoot leave frae the tyrant. Noo, rin awa' an' see tae maskin' the tea. Dr Seaton an' me ha'e a maist important medical consultation forenenst us, an' it's nae place for a young lassie."

"Squashed!" exclaimed Betty. "I've half a mind to give you no tea at all—only for the credit of Scotland I must be hospitable to the stranger. Get on with your important consultation. I know it. 'Gie the bairn plenty o' guid vittles an' fresh air, an' above a' three tablespoonfuls o' cod-liver oil ilka day. It's a graun thing for bairns. 'Deed an' there's naething the like o' it in the pharmacopœia.'"

As she concluded her burlesque, Betty curtsied derisively and took her departure.

"There's mony a true word spoken in jest," remarked her father when she had gone. "There's naething wrang wi' Duncan

but juist want o' naitural affection in his faither. Keep him oot o' the Laird's sicht an' you'll sune ha'e him weel, an' as Betty says, gi'e him plenty o' guid Norwegian cod-liver oil. It's a graun thing for bairns. 'Deed an' there's no the like o' it in——"

As he suddenly realised that he was giving me the original of his daughter's imitation he stopped short, and we both laughed heartily.

"Weel, weel, we've a' got oor crotchets, an' I'll no' deny that cod-liver oil is yin o' mine."

The doctor was such a hearty, jolly old soul that if he had advocated the advantages of strychnine as a bottle-food for infants I should not have had the heart to disagree.

By-and-by Betty returned and bore us off to the dining-room for tea. None of your afternoon teas with wafer-sandwiches and toy tea-cakes, but a genuine square meal! I saw for the first time a whole new series of varieties of scones—soda scones, whole-meal scones, potato scones, pancakes, oat-cakes, and Heaven knows what else—all home-baked and all delicious. Betty insisted upon me trying them all, and we

made for ourselves a great deal of simple merriment out of the subject.

If I have described my visit to the Forbes's at some length, there is this excuse for it—if there were no other—that it came as such a pleasant relief from the gloom and worry of Hopeton that it impressed me much more strongly than it might have done in other circumstances.

I left soon after tea, but not before I had received a most hearty invitation from the Doctor to drop in and see them whenever I could. Betty, too, invited me back in her own peculiar—but not less genuine—fashion.

“I forgive you for deceiving me,” she said, as I shook hands with her. “If you had turned out the real genuine Amurrican doctor, I should have missed a new person to talk to. Do come and be talked to when you can. I hope you don't mean to let the Monster of the Glen keep you from knowing us. He hasn't bought your soul, has he? If not, I don't see what's to prevent you dropping in here at times—and be sure and come to tea. We can produce dozens of different kinds of scones yet.”

I wandered back over the hillside in a

happier frame of mind than I had been in since I crossed the Border. After all, then, everything in Scotland was not harsh and gloomy, as my first experience tended to show.



## CHAPTER XII.

LIFE at Hopeton very soon settled down into a kind of routine. I had my own way with Duncan, whose confidence I quickly won. By keeping him as much as possible away from his father, and arranging for him to have his meals with Mrs Cunningham, the old housekeeper, I got him into a more healthy state of mind, which soon reacted upon his body. The Laird never interfered. He left me an entirely free hand, and practically ignored the existence of the boy.

His own attention was taken up to a great extent with the study of chess. He would spend hours working out the variations of some fresh opening, which he would afterwards spring upon me at our game in the evening. I was always more than a match for him, and several unorthodox gambits that he attempted ended in rapid fiascos. The more often I beat him, how-

ever, the greater his respect for me seemed to grow, and the power I attained over him in this way gradually had its effect upon his behaviour to the rest of the household.

As time went on I found that I could often nip one of his outbursts of anger in the bud by means of a few quiet words. He grew to be ashamed of losing his temper in my presence, and would often restrain himself until I had gone, but give the more violent vent to his rage in my absence.

Marigold was quick to note this change. She and I were seldom alone, though living under the same roof. Duncan was generally with me in the day, and chess took up most of my evenings. One morning, however, when I had kept the boy in bed with a cold, I met her picking flowers in the garden, and we had a chance of exchanging views.

"I sometimes wonder, Dr Seaton," she said, after we had talked for a few minutes on indifferent subjects,—“I sometimes wonder if you don't find our life here very monotonous.”

“It is so new to me that, on the contrary, I find it very interesting,” I answered.

"In any case, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing a great deal of good."

"How so?" I asked, for it had not struck me in this light.

"Look how Duncan has improved in health and spirits—how much more . . . manageable my father is! I myself have to thank you for taking a great load off my mind."

Indeed I had already noticed how much better Marigold looked than on the night of my arrival. The frightened glance of her eyes was all but gone, and there was a touch of healthy colour in her cheeks.

"If my coming has had any part in these improvements, I am more than repaid," I said.

"If only father would stop worrying about—about what I must not discuss with you," she said with a smile, "my mind would be at rest. He still spends a lot of time over the translation he has of the Flemish paper that is lost. It is that which makes him so irritable. There is a mystery that he can't solve."

"He has had no further communication with your brother at Blackdykes, I suppose?"

Marigold shook her head sadly.

"He never will," she said with a sigh.

“And I dare not see Roy either, for if father heard of it I don’t know what would happen.”

I had often wondered if my first patient had recovered from her injury, and had once or twice considered calling at the farm, but each time I thought better of it. I did not want to do anything that would upset the Laird.

Even as it was, I found myself in danger of running counter to his wishes by following up my acquaintance with Dr Forbes. I had met the old Doctor driving with his daughter several times, and if I happened to be in Kilbrennan I generally dropped in for an hour at the Doctor’s house. After all, as Betty had said, Laird Tanish had not bought my soul. Life was none too lively at Hopeton, and surely I was justified in choosing my own friends. The character of Dr Forbes appealed to me very much, and he and I had become fast friends. As for Betty, I found her a tremendous relief from the solemnity of Hopeton, where we rarely smiled and never laughed. She was always cheerful and amusing, but with a touch of real kindness that prevented her from appearing frivolous.

It was during one of these visits to Kilbrennan—about two months after my arrival

in the north—that I came in contact, once again, with Jabez Morgan.

I had come over as usual by the old Roman Road, and had met Betty Forbes on the hill-side. We had met thus in our rambles several times, naturally enough, for we were both fond of the open air, and the old road among the hills was Betty's favourite walk. As we went through the village street towards the Doctor's house—for Betty insisted that I should stop to tea—we passed the Hopeton Arms, Kilbrennan's only hotel, and in the doorway stood Morgan, surveying the neighbourhood through his spectacles, and looking as simple and harmless a creature as one could wish to meet.

He recognised me as I approached, and came running out into the street, all smiles, to meet me. As for me, I felt a tightening round the heart as I caught sight of the man—a feeling such as one would experience in the sudden shock of a motor accident—something was going to happen !

"Dear, dear, dear ! Now fancy meeting you here, Seaton !" he exclaimed, shaking me vigorously by the hand.

"I told you I was coming, so it surely can't be such a great surprise," I answered, none too heartily.



"Yes, yes! But people often change their minds, and I reckoned you'd think better of it when you'd tasted the joys of London. And how is our friend the Squire—I hear they call him Laird in this wilderness—and Miss Marigold? You see, young lady," he continued, turning with great affability to Betty, who had stood by meanwhile regarding him with a smile of mingled interest and amusement, "the Doc. here and I chummed up aboard ship—roosted together as you might say—and your local potentate with his daughter came over on the same boat. Quite a happy little family we were! Our friend the Squire——"

"You can hardly be said to have been very intimate with him," I interrupted cuttingly, incensed at his freedom towards Betty.

"Oh yes, we were intimate enough. Perhaps not, strictly speaking, *friendly*, but certainly intimate," he replied unabashed, and chuckled over his words, as if they had some meaning known only to himself.

"That sounds almost as if you were one of the family," said Betty, smiling upon him in quite a friendly fashion. "As a rule, the closer the relationship, the more ructions there are in the camp."

"Dear, dear," exclaimed Morgan. "You *are* a noticing young lady."

He looked at Betty closely, as if he had suddenly seen reason to take a greater interest in her. Then suddenly I remembered the astonishing resemblance I had noticed between Morgan and young Roy Tanish. Had Betty seen it too, I wondered?

"I suppose you are acquainted with our friends the Tanishes?" asked Morgan of Betty.

"Yes, Marigold is almost my only girl friend."

I was surprised to find Betty so ready to be affable with Morgan, forgetting that she had none of the knowledge that rendered me so suspicious of him.

"Then, perhaps—seeing the Doc. here seems a bit touchy on the subject—perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me if they are all well and flourishing?"

"Yes, there is nothing the matter at Hopeton, so far as I know."

"Old gentleman's temper pretty much as usual?"

Betty smiled, showing a sparkle of white teeth.

"Variable to stormy, speaking barometrically," she replied; "so at least I understand,

for he and I are not the best of friends, and I see as little of him as possible. Are you staying long in the district, Mr—— You did not mention your friend's name, Dr Seaton!"

I was compelled to go through the form of an introduction.

"Ah! That's the point, Miss Forbes," said Morgan in reply to Betty's question. "I am staying as long in the district as it will take to carry through my business—and that's a conundrum I can't guess the answer to."

"Somewhat vague," agreed Betty.

"Perhaps you'd drop in and see me in this one-horse hotel, Seaton," said Morgan, turning again to me. "Have a chat—talk over old times. There's one or two things I'd like to say to you, if I may."

I thought it much safer to have nothing to do with the man, but on the other hand I was anxious to know if he intended to come to Hopeton—and, if so, when. I felt sure he would cause trouble, and I wanted to be able to warn Marigold in advance. She, who knew the circumstances, would be able to judge if it was possible to keep him away.

With this passing through my mind, I

agreed to call at the hotel before I left the village, and we parted for the moment.

"I like your Mr Morgan," said Betty, as we continued up the village street. "He looks honest in a way, and yet he seems to be pretty cute—a wily variety of bird, I should think. He has an innocent kind of look which is mostly smile and spectacles. Take both of these away and he would be a different man altogether—and yet I like him."

I had a momentary picture of Morgan as I had seen him that night in our cabin with his glasses off, and I marvelled at Betty's rapid and accurate judgment. I wondered if she was equally justified in liking the man.

Dr Forbes was away at an outlying farm, so Betty and I had tea entirely by ourselves. As the conversation still turned upon Morgan, in whom Betty seemed to take a great interest, I described my meeting with him aboard the *Sphinx*, and told her of the feud that seemed to exist between Morgan and the Tanishes. I did not feel justified in speaking of Laird Tanish's nocturnal visit to our cabin, but with that exception I related pretty much what I have already set down of our life aboard ship.

"So you see," I concluded, "you are quite right in thinking that Morgan is not so simple as he looks. Whether he is honest or not is another matter."

"I don't see that you have told me anything against the poor man," replied Betty. "The fact that the Monster of the Glen was horribly down on him is rather in his favour. As for Marigold, she told you there was nothing against him, and yet she was very rude to him when he spoke to her. But then girls are rather unaccountable. She may be fond of him! That would explain her contradictions."

"You don't seem to have a high opinion of your sex, then?" I said inquiringly.

"No woman has!" she answered. "Each of us thinks she is the only sensible one in the mob. That is why women condescend to one another so much—and hate each other for doing so. But we are getting away from Mr Morgan. Do you know, I am quite certain that he is a Tanish."

"I think you must be right," I agreed. "He certainly resembles Roy."

"Yes, and the Monster too. But I thought you had never met Roy?"

"I did—once," I replied. "I might as



well tell you, though I have kept the story to myself so far."

I must admit that I found it difficult to keep anything from Betty. She was so ready to be interested in what one had to say, and so honest and open herself, that it seemed the most natural thing possible to tell her things that one would not have dreamt of mentioning to another. So now I found myself describing to her my arrival in Kilbrennan, and my meeting with Roy Tanish and his wife. I told her everything as it had happened, up to the time of my appearance at the door of Hopeton.

"You are a regular mine of mysteries," she said, when I reached the end of my story. "I can't make head or tail of it all. Do you believe that some one shot Mrs Roy?"

I nodded, but said nothing.

"Unless it was the Monster himself, in a more boisterous frame of mind than usual, I don't know any one in the neighbourhood who would be likely to do such a thing."

I began to wish that I had not told the story. The Laird *had* been out with a shot-gun that night!

"Then you go dragging in a mysterious paper, which probably means nothing at

all—and blood-stains on it, bless you! You really ought to be at Scotland Yard, or even Baker Street, Bob!”

We had drifted to the use of one another's Christian names in the course of our country walks. With such a friendly girl as Betty it was inevitable.

“Are you on calling terms at Blackdykes?” I asked.

“I called once, but I don't seem to get on with Marie, and she never returned the visit. Still, I have a good mind to go and see that she is all right. They never sent for the Dad, so the injury could not have been serious.”

We drifted away from the subject, and shortly afterwards I remembered my appointment with Morgan, and took my leave.

## CHAPTER XIII.

MORGAN received me effusively when I entered the little sitting-room he had engaged at the Hopeton Arms.

"Come along in, Seaton. Take the arm-chair. I'm afraid it is a bit hard though, like everything else in our poor old motherland. Dear, dear! Fancy us both turning out to be Scotch in the roots. We must have been thrown together by Providence, Seaton, so that you might be able to help me in my plans."

"It couldn't have been Providence, for Providence never makes mistakes," I replied. "I don't intend to be mixed up in your plans, whatever they may be. I am engaged by Tanish to look after his boy—Tanish and you are on bad terms. Obviously it is not to my advantage to have anything to do with you."

"Dear, dear, dear! You are very impetuous, Seaton. But I like a man that

speaks out what is in his mind. You are quite wrong, though. It may be far more to your advantage to be friendly with me than with Tanish. Besides, I don't want to compromise you with your employer. On the contrary——"

"Look here, Morgan," I interrupted; "the only help you can get from me is in the way of advice—and my advice is, clear out of the district. I don't know what little game you have on, but I'm sure you are going to make trouble at Hopeton. You once told me you had a great admiration for Miss Tanish. You will cause her a lot of anxiety if you stay. We have just succeeded in getting her father into a quieter frame of mind, and everything is going on swimmingly. Your appearance will rouse the Laird to new spasms of rage. You know that you always affect him in that way."

"Very true, Seaton, what you say," agreed Morgan, who had listened mildly to all my remarks. "But don't you think that you look at things too much from the Tanish point of view. What about the Morgan side of it, now? Here's me, travelled all the way from London to my benighted motherland for the purpose of ingratiating myself with Marigold Tanish. Now you

may take it from me, Seaton, that I don't leave until I've got round that girl! I've got to see her, I've got to talk to her and explain things a bit, and it's up to you to get me the first interview without the Squire knowing of it."

All this was said in Morgan's customary gentle deprecating way, but I knew enough of him by this time to be sure that he meant every word. I did not mean to be browbeaten into acting as his cat's-paw, however.

"Why should I be your go-between?" I demanded. "I tell you I don't mean to be mixed up in any of your doings."

"As to why," replied Morgan with a gentle smile, "the explanation is simple. You would not like me to march up to the door of Hopeton and ask for Miss Tanish. There would be a hell of a row, which is what you want to avoid. So you see, from your own point of view, it will be much better to arrange a meeting privately for me."

I felt in a cleft stick, for what he said was true. I could see no way out of the difficulty, and was on the point of admitting as much when Morgan spoke again.

"Look here, Seaton," he said, and as he



spoke he crossed the room and put his hand on my shoulder in a friendly fashion. "You are out of your depth in this business. It's all mystery to you. Heaven knows there's plenty mystery for the rest of us who are in it, but for you who have been kept in the dark all along, it must be worse. I suppose Tanish has never told you what he wanted of me in America?"

I shook my head.

"I daresay he hasn't swanked about being related to me neither?"

"No," I said. "But recently I have guessed it."

Morgan smiled broadly.

"You mean that your pretty Miss Forbes guessed it for you in the twinkle of a gnat's eyebrow! Dear, dear, she is a cute piece of goods, your Miss Forbes. But I like her. You're a lucky man, Seaton. All the lavish flows your way. All the more reason why you should do your damndest for me."

"Whatever is in the wind, it does not concern me," I said stubbornly. "You can easily send Miss Tanish a note."

"Perhaps if I tell you more, you may be more friendly towards me," said Morgan. "At present all you know is that our friend

the Squire—my forty-second cousin, by the way—calls me a thief, a swindler, a rogue, a blackguard, and any other tasty little title that crosses his august mind. Also you know that Marigold his daughter does not hold yours truly in high repute—but I don't believe you have ever heard her call me any of these pretty names, eh?"

"No," I agreed. "She has even gone so far as to say that she had no reason to doubt your honesty."

"Heaven bless her!" smiled Morgan, and I did not know whether it was in earnest or burlesque. "Well, I'll tell you the story. You can picture me leading a peaceful life in Chestnuthill, N.Y., undisturbed by the slightest thought of my English relations. I am a portrait painter, and if you knew anything at all about modern art, the name of Jabez Morgan would be familiar to you. Don't apologise. It's no disgrace to you, but it shows the value of fame."

He paused to offer me a cigarette, and light one for himself.

"Dear, dear, it's a strange thing is family affection," he continued, as he blew a great cloud of smoke from his lungs. "Along comes the Squire with his pretty daughter, reveals himself to me as the long-lost cousin,

who has looked me up while touring the States, and sits plump down in my little place like a clam.

"I treated them to the best I had—showed them the sights, introduced them to my friends, gave parties for them,—altogether the Squire had no cause to complain of his welcome. And note this, Seaton. At that time I just took the old boy's word that he was my cousin. I knew nothing of my ancestry. We don't take much stock in corpses over yonder, as you know. Along comes the Squire, tells me I am the last descendant of the younger branch of the family, and there you are. Of course I knew that my mother's name was Tanish, and that she hadn't a relation left that I could borrow from, so I guessed he was right—which he was, as it turned out, except on one point.

"Well, this went on for some weeks, and we all had a real good time. I got fair crazed with Marigold. I won't say she was ditto to me, but she was as friendly and cousinly as a young girl could well be, and I began to have hopes of joining the two branches up into one again.

"Bit by bit our friend the Squire began to let me into the history of the family.

I'm not strong on it even now, but I can tell you enough to give you an idea how we drifted across the pond.

"It seems that way back in early times, when the Stewarts were mucking around anyhow in the old country, our little lot were all for the nobby side when the ructions began. There was a certain Roy Tanish fought in the rebellion of 1715, and got his skull cracked for his pains. He had two sons, had Roy, who were in petticoats and pinnies at the time, and it was about these two sons that the Squire and I had our first rumpus.

"I'll give the Squire's version first, for it was all news to me and I didn't doubt a word of it. According to him, then, these two sons were called Dougal and Hamish—Dougal being the elder and the heir to the estate of Hopeton, which was then a much grander affair than it is now. Years passed by and the two boys grew up. According to the Squire, Dougal, the elder brother, was a quiet inoffensive kind of a mutt; while Hamish, the younger brother, was a dashing go-ahead fellow, who got mixed up in all the plots and games that were going on round about the French Court.

"Along comes the next rebellion, which, as you know, took place in 1745. By this

time the boys were well on in the thirties, and Dougal had married and settled down at Hopeton. Master Hamish, like the bold bad boy he was, was in the thick of the trouble.

“Well, according to the Squire, Hamish was over in Ayrshire before the rebellion opened out, making arrangements for a general rising in the district and turning everything that was negotiable into dollars. He did his damndest to rush brother Dougal into the biz., but Doug. was a fly old cuss and lay low. The utmost he would do was to give Hamish all the dust he could scrape together by levying toll on his tenants. In this way he hoped to be on good terms with the Pretender if he came out top, and at the same time avoid trouble if Bonnie Prince Charlie landed a dud.

“Hamish got together a good fat wad of greenbacks. He didn’t send them over to Charlie in France—probably he knew his fellow-conspirators too well. His idea was to present the treasure to the boss himself when he came over and make sure of all the credit. However, it never came off. The plot fizzled out. Hamish had banked his fund somewhere, to be drawn at the right moment, but when the other side roped him in—which



they did when his luck was out—he never had a chance to get at it.

“According to the laws of those days, Hamish’s head was due to be amputated at dawn or thereabouts ; but whether there was a blunder in the execution department, or whether Hamish had influential friends on the winning side, the fact remains that he got off with transportation for life to the plantations in Virginia, and was duly towed across the pond with a cargo of lucky ones like himself.

“Now, according to the Squire—for we are still following his version of the story—Dougal stayed at home and lived happy ever after. He didn’t know but what Prince Charlie had received the dollars and blued the lot on his unfortunate trip to Scotland, so although he mourned the loss of his share, he sat tight and thought himself well out of it all at the price.

“It seems there was only one person who knew that this treasure still existed intact, and he was a confidential Flemish servant who had been mixed up with Hamish in all his plottings. When his master was caught out, he succeeded in escaping from the country. For years after, he intended to return to Scotland and hunt up the oof, but something

always prevented him. Besides, he had only a very vague idea of where Hamish had planted the stuff.

"As he grew old, his conscience began to trouble him, I suppose. Anyhow he wrote to Dougal Tanish, and told him all he knew of the treasure, which wasn't much, except that he knew the dollars had been planted and never recovered.

"The Squire didn't know if his ancestor had ever been able to read this letter. It was written in Flemish, and he himself discovered it by chance while hunting through a lot of old papers. He happened to have a Belgian lady at Hopeton who was able to translate the letter for him, and then the old boy started hunting round every likely spot in the neighbourhood, hoping to light on the dollars by chance.

"Of course he failed. But being a determined old boy, he began to think of other ways of hitting on the dibs, and the only possible chance lay in hunting out Hamish's descendants in the States, and finding out if they had any papers or traditions on the subject. Hence the cousinly visit to yours truly."

I had listened with great interest to Morgan's narrative, which explained so much

that had been dark to me. I felt sure that his story was true in the main, though it might be coloured to suit his own interests.

"Surely Tanish did not put the real object of his visit quite so plainly after at first pretending that he was on a mere pleasure tour," I commented, as Morgan paused in his story.

"No, he is too wily an old bird for that. The story, as I have told it to you, came out in bits, now and again, generally after Mari-gold had hopped off to bed and we were having a nightcap together. Then gradually he began to wonder if my side of the family had not left any records. He told me he was going to write a history of the family, and that a section on the American branch would complete it nicely. The treasure part of the story only came out when he found he couldn't get me interested in the family records otherwise. I was sure all along that he had something more than the history of the family up his sleeve, so I pretended to take little interest, and at last he was compelled to put down his best trump."

"From what you said at the start," I said, "I gather that the story you have told me is not strictly accurate."

“No, it is not. The main part of the yarn is gospel truth ; but on one particular point it runs off the lines just about as far as it could. The Squire was taking no chances that he could avoid, but then neither was I. We now come to my side of the story. I’ve my record here in my grip.”

Morgan went to the neighbouring bedroom, and returned carrying a small black bag.

## CHAPTER XIV.

MORGAN placed the bag upon the table, opened it, and took out a large envelope.

"I've got my side of the story here," he said with his usual innocent smile. "Dear, dear, dear! It's sad to think that a hearty old boy like the Squire should be such a double-dealing rogue — especially when he has a daughter like Marigold!"

"I have only your word for it that he is a rogue, remember. And I have his that you are one, for that matter," I added sharply, for I had no intention of being false to the salt I ate.

Morgan smiled, but showed no trace of embarrassment.

"Well, well," he said with a sigh, "slinging names around don't help things for'ard. Documentary evidence is the sure test. Tanish must have gone to some trouble picking up my trail. Our family came from way down in Virginia, and my mother was



the last of the bunch. Her two brothers were both killed in the war, fighting under Lee, and she was left a mere kiddy with nobody but an old black mammy to look after her. Some kind neighbours took her in and brought her up, and when she grew to long frocks she up and married a Northerner from New York State—no doubt to the great horror of her foster-parents. Anyhow, she stuck to the family papers good and safe, and handed them over to me before she died, poor lady.

“These same papers were stowed away for years at the back of an old writing-desk, and I had all but forgotten them when along comes Squire with his family history. I lay low, as I’ve told you, and learnt all I could, but I took no great interest until he out with the story of the treasure. That set me raking out the lumber in the writing-desk, but I chose midnight to do it, when my affectionate relative was safe in the land of nod.

“I found the story of my great-great-grandfather Hamish’s life wrote out in his own hand, and a pesky hard hand it was to decipher, as you can see for yourself.”

Morgan drew some sheets from the envelope and handed them to me. They were

yellow and worn with age, and the ink was faded to a yellow brown, which was almost illegible, apart from the crabbedness of the handwriting.

"Has Laird Tanish seen this?" I asked, as I glanced through the pages, without being able to read more than a stray word.

"Sure!" replied Morgan, chuckling as though at some joke of his own. "I guess he has read very little of it, though. He hadn't time. However, I'll tell you about that in its place. I fished out this paper, then, and spent the best part of the night wrestling with it. I found that the story was pretty much as the Squire had told it, except for one thing. Hamish, my ancestor, was the *elder* brother, and Dougal, his ancestor, the younger. That put rather a different complexion on things! It was Hamish himself who scraped together the dollars, sold what he could of the family estates, and raised money on the rest. Dougal took no hand in the rising at all. He simply lay doggo, saying nuffin.

"There is a passage in the paper you hold in your hand—which, by the way, is practically the old boy's last will and testament—saying as there seemed no hope of either himself or his children ever returning to

claim what he calls his 'just inheritance,' he relinquishes all his rights in Hopeton to his younger brother Dougal and to his heirs forever. Let me find it for you."

Morgan took the time-worn papers and ran his finger down the pages.

"There it is—look," he said, pointing to the passage. "But look further on. 'With the sole exception of the treasure that I gathered together for my rightful but unfortunate King—Charles Stewart—and which I have put in a place of security to be hereinafter set forth. This treasure I will and bequeath unto my children, Hamish and Charles, to be theirs equally between them, or failing them, unto their heirs at such time as it pleases God that the treasure may be discovered.'

"That's plain enough, eh, Seaton? Yet that aged relative comes along and pitches me a yarn wholly contrary! He's some liar, is our friend the Squire!"

"How do you know?" I demanded. "He may have believed all he told you. Why should you be so certain that he was deliberately deceiving you?"

"Dear, dear, you are a one to stick up for the hand that feeds you, Seaton! If I had no other reason to be sure he was deceiving

me from the start, I have seen enough of his tricks since to know that if he wants anything there is nothing on earth that he'll stick at. Just you wait until you've heard the whole story.

"I tackled the Squire next day on this very point. I suggested that he might have made a mistake, and that my branch of the family was the elder. It was the first time I saw him in a rage. Up till then he had been as amiable and gentle as a boarding-school miss, but now I saw the other side of the picture. The very way he stormed was enough to show that he was bluffing out a bad lie.

"Now I can't tell you this yarn, Seaton, without bringing in a love interest. God knows I don't want to spread myself on the subject of Marigold, but the story can't go on and leave her out. By this time I was fair crazy on the girl, and she and I had great times together. I don't want to boast, but I honestly believe she was growing to like me some, and in time I might have made her like me more, but just in the doubtful days when she could be turned either to hate me or the other thing I made a stummer, and it was hate for mine.

"When the Squire simmered down a bit I

put a proposition to him. It wasn't meant for a downright bargain, but he took it as such.

"‘After all,’ I said to him, ‘what does it matter which of these two mutts was born first. They’ve both been under ground a good long hundred years, and there’s no need to rake up old scores. Surely we can settle all this friendly-like. Suppose, now, that Marigold and myself could fix up a match, what’s to prevent the two branches of the family becoming one? Then, if there’s any treasure to share, we can all share alike.’

"The Squire tramped up and down my best carpet totting up the ayes and noes. Evidently the ayes had it, for at last he stopped opposite me and said—

"‘A very good suggestion, Morgan. The best way out of the difficulty. Let me see the manuscript.’

"‘Not so fast, cousin,’ I answered, or words to that effect. ‘It’s a long way yet to the wedding ceremony.’

"Then, of course, another storm broke. Did I think he was a swindler, or that his daughter would not carry out his wishes?—and a lot more of that kind of tosh. I just had to let him run dry, but I stuck to the papers like glue.



"Now it was no intention of mine, Seaton, to make a bargain with the Squire for his daughter's hand, but the silly old ass took me up that way, and off he set to make Marigold agree. Then the fat was in the fire. Of course she wouldn't hear of it, being a fine high-spirited girl. The things she called me! Why, it was an education to me. Dear, dear! What a girl she is. The real Tanish stock without a doubt!

"It was a most exciting chat we had. She never gave me a chance to explain, but asked me if I mistook her for a cow, or some such domestic animal, to be bargained for without her having a say in it at all. I tell you, Seaton, she had some say! Then the old man went for *her*, because she would not obey his wishes; and finally, just to round the affair off neatly, *I* went for *him* hot and strong, for giving Marigold a false idea of me.

"Marigold wanted to leave my house at once — that very day — but the Squire wouldn't hear of it. He still had hopes of coming to terms with me, I suppose, and in any case he was determined to have the key to the treasure by hook or by crook."

"Then you actually have a key to this treasure?" I asked, for so far Morgan had not definitely said so.

"Sure!" he replied promptly. "You shall see it by-and-by! I mean to be absolutely open with you. I'm out to lay every card on the table.

"Well, they stayed one more night in my house, much to Marigold's disgust. She never spoke a word to me at meals, and kept out of my way between them. She went off to bed as early as possible, and for the rest of the evening the Squire made every effort he knew how to get the key to the treasure out of me. He argued first and bullied afterwards, and finally he came down to trying to make a deal. He offered me a quarter, and then a third, then a half, and by midnight he had promised I should have two-thirds of the boodle if only I'd let him in.

"Well, I reckoned he hadn't treated me straight, Seaton, and I'd made up my mind he should pay for his crookedness, so not a word would I say to help him. Mind you, that treasure belongs to me by right! He hasn't the vestige of a claim on it, but if he'd come straight and slung out the facts, I guess I'd have let him in on the ground floor.

"When he went off to bed he was roaring and cussing like a man in his prime. I couldn't sleep for thinking how I'd been let

down over Marigold; and I dessay I put in a fair record myself for cussing in the course of the night. I rose early, meaning to go out and walk off my troubles; but as I passed the door of my den I noticed that the top of my desk was open. I knew I had closed it before I went off to roost, so I went in to investigate. The lock was broken, and it didn't take me the wink of a gnat's eyebrow to discover that old Father Hamish's last words had taken wings.

"I stood still looking at the old desk and thinking things out. I didn't waste much grey matter fixing on the thief—it wanted no giddy Sherlock for that part of the job—but I was puzzling on the best way to set about getting my paper back. It didn't take me very long to decide that the straightforward way was the best, so back I went upstairs again.

"I walked straight to the door of the Squire's room, opened it, and went in. It was like the bull-headedness of the old boy not to worry about locking the door behind him. He'd got what he wanted, and he never even thought of putting himself safe. That's the Squire all over. He don't care a damn for anything so long as he gets what he wants.

“Well, I walked straight in, and there he was sitting by the window in a gorgeous dressing-gown, busy copying out the key to the treasure. I didn’t waste any time chin-wagging. Before he had quite grasped the glad news that I was on his trail, I grabbed the papers off his dressing-table, taking care to get the copy he was making as well as the original.

“I thought he’d have had a fit. He didn’t show any false modesty about being caught in the act. Not he! It was just pure rage, such as you would expect a man to show if you sneaked his own goods from under his nose. He sprang at me like a young ’un, and we rolled over on the floor wrapped in each other’s arms. I’d got the papers stowed away in my inside coat-pocket, and I had enough wind left in me to keep him off them.

“Right into the middle of the riot strolled Marigold, looking lovely with her dark hair hanging down in waves, and a pale blue embroidered dressing-gown wrapped round her. Oh, I don’t miss much that’s going, Seaton; you can bet on that!

“‘Father! Mr Morgan!’ she said, looking in astonishment at us two wriggling on the floor.

"We got on our feet as quick as light, and, judging by the Squire, we looked about as guilty as a couple of little boys caught stealing apples.

"What is the meaning of this exhibition?" asked Marigold, looking from one to the other of us.

"I stammered out some tosh about how I was showing her old man some exercises for the good of his liver, but it didn't sound convincing even to myself. Marigold wasn't taking any of it.

"I want the truth!" she demanded, mightily sharp.

"The truth is,' bellowed the Squire, who was getting his wind back—'the truth is that this man we have treated as a friend and a relation is a rogue and a thief. Get your things packed. We leave his house at once!'

"Pretty good, that, from the man who had broken into my desk in the small hours of the night, and who was trying to do me out of a fortune! However, I said nothing. It couldn't do any good, and the girl was his daughter.

"They left that morning. It was only chance that put us both aboard the same boat coming over. You know what hap-



pened there! The Squire, being the determined old boy he is, was certain to have another bid for my papers, but he hadn't an earthly. They were under my pillow every night. Things were getting warm when I found we were booked to share a cabin. If you hadn't happened along and done me a real favour, I don't know how things would have panned out."

"I take it, then, that having the key, you set out at once to recover the treasure before Tanish had time to search further?" I asked.

"That's about it," agreed Morgan.

"Then why have you kept away from here so long?" I asked with some surprise.

"Look at that, and you will see what has delayed me," and with that he placed before me the strangest document I have ever seen.

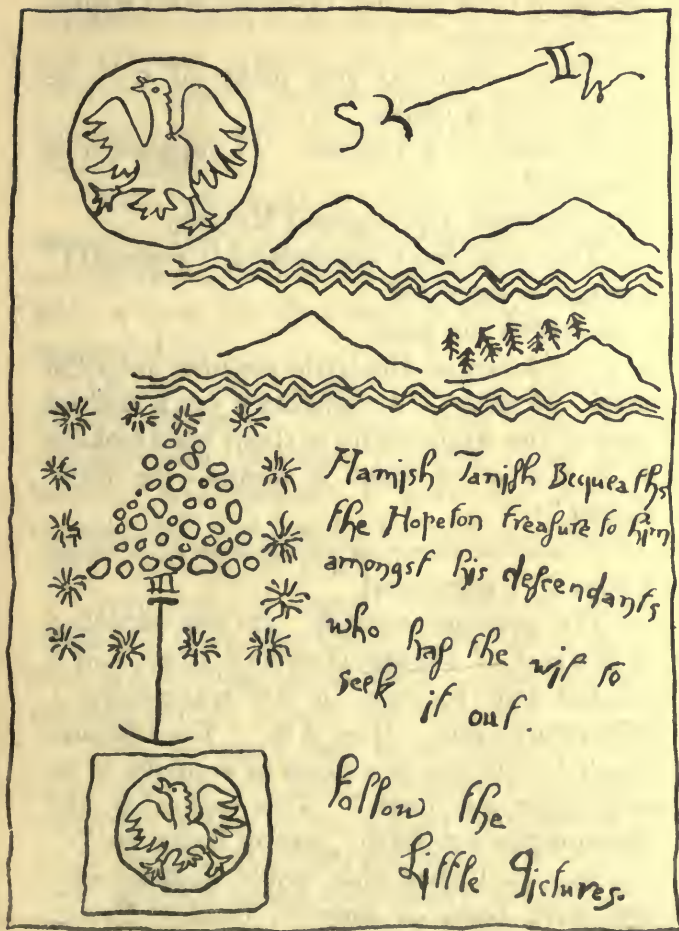
## CHAPTER XV.

“THAT,” declared Morgan, beaming at me through his spectacles, “is the key to the Hopeton treasure!”

I looked long and carefully at the single sheet of paper that he placed before me. It was yellow and worn with age, and the ink upon it was faded and brown. Here was no straightforward paper of directions. It was either a hoax or a cipher—and a cipher which would not be solved by any of the known rules, for in place of the letters or numbers that are usually found in such things, there was a series of rude diagrams sprawling over the paper. Underneath these queer hieroglyphics the following words were written:—

“Hamish Tanish bequeaths the Hopeton treasure to him amongst his descendants who has the wit to seek it out. Follow the little pictures.”

I gazed intently at the paper for some time, but as I could make neither head nor



tail of it, I looked up inquiringly, to find Morgan's eyes resting upon me with a quizzical expression.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked, with a smile.

"Nothing!" I replied. "I suppose it is a cipher?"

"I suppose it is," agreed Morgan.

"Then you don't understand it yourself?" I asked in surprise.

He shook his head.

"I've followed the little pictures until I'm tired," he said. "I could draw you a faithful copy of the whole thing without once looking at it, but as to what it means—I'm flummoxed."

"I suppose there is no chance of it being a hoax?" I suggested.

"It's genuine enough. It was attached to the end of Father Hamish's story, and I pointed out to you in his manuscript a reference to this. Here it is. 'The treasure which I have put in a place of security to be hereinafter set forth.' This cipher is the 'hereinafter set forth,' but it beats me."

"You said that this would explain why you have been so long in coming North. How is that?" I asked.

"Well, you see, after I'd given up hope of

solving the thing myself, I decided to put it into the hands of an expert. I've tried 'em all—all that I could find, at least. Hand-writing experts, puzzle-solvers, private detectives—not one of 'em could fake up a decent solution."

"Well, you have at least succeeded in spreading the story of the Hopeton treasure among the very class of people who would have a nose for that sort of thing," I remarked drily.

"I'm not such a mutt as that, Seaton," replied Morgan. "They never saw the original with Hamish's remarks about the treasure underneath. I drew up copies, showing the pictures by themselves, and let them butt against that."

"Even then," I argued, "if one of these chaps did solve the thing, what was to prevent him keeping the solution to himself, and hunting out the treasure at his ease?"

"That sounds a deal more plausible than it is," replied Morgan. "Suppose we knew what was in this cipher, I don't suppose we'd find a full list of directions, so that we could walk straight along and realise the dollars. We'd more likely get some hints or landmarks or such-like, which we would have to use along with the data in Hamish's story.



If one of these guys had solved the thing, the chances are it would mean nothing to him."

"Perhaps you are right," I said. "Still, it was fairly dangerous. Have you given up all hope of finding the treasure, then?"

"I guess not. That brings us back to where we started off. Are you still determined that you won't lend a hand to help me with Marigold?"

"My position is difficult," I said thoughtfully. "A great deal depends upon what you want me to do."

"If only I could convince you that I am on the straight, Seaton, we'd get on a darned sight faster. I treated the Squire straight all through. I've told you my story as straight as a die, and I'll prove to you now that I'm going to play straight with Marigold and her respected dad right to the finish. Look here—here's a couple of copies of the cipher." He drew them from his pocket as he spoke.

"I want you to take one of them to Marigold, and tell her all you know about it. She may show it to her father or not, as she chooses. Tell her that I would like to meet her and talk to her about it, but that if she'd rather not see me I'll keep out of her

way—for the present. That's all I ask of you, Seaton.

"This other copy I mean to give to my other cousin at Blackdykes, where I'm going to stay for a bit."

"Going to stay at Blackdykes?" I exclaimed, quite taken aback by this latest development.

"Why not?" asked Morgan. He looked at me in innocent surprise. "I've been out to see Roy Tanish and his wife. They treated me real kind, and asked me to come and stop at the farm. I'm going out there to-night."

Here was a complication! I wondered how much Morgan knew of the relations between Blackdykes and Hopeton. I made a sudden resolution. Morgan had told me the whole of his story—I believed truly. I would tell him what I knew. It could do no harm that I could see.

"Look here, Morgan," I said. "What do you know of Roy and his wife?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I got here yesterday, and inquired into things. The landlord told me that the Squire's son lived at Blackdykes, and, as he was the only one of the family with whom I hadn't had a row, I thought I'd better call. They received

me most politely when I told them who I was."

"Did you speak of the treasure?" I asked.

"Not a word," answered Morgan. "It was the lady who invited me to bring my trunk and nail it to the floor—a handsome woman, but not my style. Too gloomy and tomb-stoney for my taste."

"I'm going to tell you all I know of Roy and his wife, Morgan," I said. "I think you are walking into trouble by going there. If you don't find trouble for yourself, you are going to make it for others."

With that I told him the story of the feud between Roy and his father, and the cause of it all. Morgan listened intently while I spoke, his eyes looking round and innocent through his glasses. I told him of the Flemish document, and how Roy's wife had stolen it in the absence of the Laird. I told him, also, that I believed, from what I had seen myself, that Roy knew nothing about this, and, as far as I could discover, had no knowledge of the treasure whatever. The fact that I had found the paper in his wife's possession, and that he was quite ignorant of its significance, seemed to show that she was playing a lone hand.

"A bit of a dark horse, is Mrs Roy," said Morgan, as I concluded. "Well, Seaton, we've cleared the air a bit with our stories, and I don't think you'd have told me yours, if you hadn't begun to trust me a bit more. What am I to do now? If I go to Blackdykes, the Squire will take it that I'm in league against him, and I want to conciliate the old scoundrel for the sake of Marigold."

As I was about to reply, I heard a voice in which I could not be mistaken. Sure enough the door opened a moment afterwards and Betty Forbes walked into the room, bringing with her an atmosphere of colour and beauty. Her rich hair flamed as it caught the evening sunlight—there was a flush of heightened colour in her face—and from her brown eyes there sparkled a new excitement.

"Still here, Bob," she exclaimed as she entered. "I thought I might catch you. Please excuse this intrusion, Mr Morgan. It is important that I should speak to Dr Seaton as quickly as possible."

"That's all right, young lady," said Morgan, beaming upon Betty so amiably that one could almost imagine that his spectacles were radiating light; "I'll leave you to have

it out with him," and he made as if to go out of the room.

"Just a moment, Morgan," I said, putting my hand upon his shoulder. "Has what you have to say got anything to do with the Tanishes, Betty?"

"Yes, it's about the Laird—and Marie!" replied Betty.

"Then I don't think Mr Morgan need go. He had better hear all there is to hear on that subject."

"Aha!" exclaimed Betty. "I see you have come round to my view of Mr Morgan."

"I hope your view was a favourable one, Miss Forbes," said Morgan earnestly.

"I only said that you *look* honest," answered Betty. "But I don't claim to be a judge of character."

Her eyes twinkled merrily as she paid him this rather dubious compliment. Morgan bowed deeply, as though overcome by her good opinion.

"Now my news," Betty went on. "You know, before you left, Bob, I said that I'd call upon Marie Tanish again at Blackdykes. A few minutes later the Dad came in, and as the pony had done very little work to-day, I thought I might just as well go at once.



I left the trap at the end of the farm road and walked up to the house. As I got no answer to my knock, I wandered round to the garden at the back, thinking that probably Marie was out amongst the flowers.

"Of course I know—everybody in the district knows—the kind of terms that Roy and his father are on, so I was naturally astonished to hear the voice of the Monster of the Glen in the garden—and not raised in wrath either!"

"The Laird at Blackdykes!" I exclaimed. "There's going to be trouble!"

"That is what I am afraid of—if Roy comes home," agreed Betty. "You know that I dislike meeting the Laird. When I heard that he was there, I stopped for a moment to think what I should do. I had no intention of eavesdropping, but I overheard a few words which showed me that the Monster and Marie are quite friendly again. What I heard was something like this—

"'And you swear that Roy knows nothing of this?' That was the voice of the Monster.

"'I have told him nothing. He has never seen the paper,' Marie answered. I can't imitate her broken English properly.

“‘That’s a bargain, then,’ said the Laird.

“‘I shall keep it,’ replied Marie. ‘But you must keep away from here. If Roy saw you——’

“That is all I heard. I thought it was best to clear off and tell you, because if Roy should find his father at Blackdykes, goodness knows what might happen. Mari-gold has told me all that happened after her return with her father from America, and I know the tempers of both men. You have a lot of influence with the Laird, Bob, so I thought it best to see you at once.”

“Hang it all, Betty,” I protested, “I’m only Duncan’s tutor and nurse. I can’t go off to Blackdykes and insist on taking the Laird home and putting him to bed.”

“I don’t think there is anything to be done,” declared Morgan. “From what Miss Forbes has told us, I should say the Squire was just about at the end of his interview with Mrs Roy. They had made some bargain. Probably he left soon after.”

“I daresay you are right,” I agreed, the more willingly as I did not want to be mixed up in the affair.

“Then you think I have been agitating

myself about nothing?" said Betty in a disappointed tone.

"On the contrary, it's likely that it will prove a pretty serious business," replied Morgan. "The Squire and Marie are in league for the discovery of the treasure, and Roy is being left in the dark. If ever he finds out anything, blood will flow—at least it would in the States!"

"What do you mean by the treasure?" demanded Betty.

"Seaton will tell you all about it, Miss Forbes. I must get away." Then, turning to me, he continued, "This latest news has decided me. I am going to stay at Blackdykes. I want to see more of Roy's wife. But I shall say nothing of the cipher. As I told you, I meant that Roy should have a copy, but for the present I shall keep it dark. Tell Mari-gold as much of my story as you think fit. Give her this copy of the cipher, and see if she can make anything of it. She may show it to her father if she likes. See if you can solve the thing yourself. Miss Forbes here will lend you a hand, and she is a cute one. We're all in the running now, and if any one of us can make good, we'll share the profits."

I took the copy of the cipher, folded it, and put it in my pocket; and as I did so, I thought how Morgan had managed to have his own way again. I had begun this interview with him, determined that he should have no help from me in his schemes, and now I found myself willingly taking his instructions.

"By the way," he resumed, "we must make some arrangement to meet. I can't come to Hopeton at present, and you don't want to be seen at Blackdykes."

"But you can both come to Kilbrennan, and either meet at our house, or leave messages for each other with me," said Betty.

"The very thing," agreed Morgan, and at that we left it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

I RETURNED to Hopeton, accompanied a good part of the way by Betty, who was eager to hear Morgan's story. I told it to her as we walked, and we made our first effort to solve the mystery of the cipher while we rested upon the dyke of the old Roman road.

It was a lovely evening in June, but we were too deep in our puzzle to take notice at the time of the wonderful panorama spread beneath us. For my own part, I must admit that though the scenery had no charms for me, I was not so wrapt up in the solution of the cipher but that I was conscious of the charm of my companion. The soft strands of her glorious hair swept my cheek as we bent together over the paper, and my fingers touched hers—more or less accidentally—as we drew one another's attention to the peculiarities of the "little pictures." It is small wonder that I did not concentrate the



whole of my attention upon the problem before us.

"I have never seen a real cipher before," said Betty gleefully. "I don't suppose we shall solve it straight away if all Mr Morgan's experts have failed. Still, let's have a try."

It was easy to say "have a try," but looking at the document did not seem to help us much.

"I know what the first little picture is," continued Betty hopefully. "That is the Hopeton crest."

"I expect even Morgan has guessed that, as he wears it in a ring on his finger," I replied. "It is repeated at the bottom, so I expect it means no more than that Hamish set his seal to the paper."

"You're not very encouraging, you know," remarked Betty, turning her brown eyes on me comically. "I have a good mind to let you solve the cipher for yourself."

"Don't do that," I begged earnestly, placing my hand over hers upon the paper. "I'm sure we shall get on better together than apart."

But Betty only laughed, and carelessly took her hand away from mine.

"Don't be silly, Bob," she said, and turned again to the paper.

I sighed and strove to give the little pictures my full attention, but I knew that it was impossible whilst Betty was by.

"What I should like to know is if these things mean the things they look like, or if they are only symbols for something else," my companion went on merrily.

"If you were anybody but the most gorgeous and delectable young woman on earth, I should be compelled to tell you that you are talking rot," I replied lazily.

"Without admitting your adjectives, which are absurd, I insist that I am not talking rot. This is what I mean. Here is a thing like an anchor. Does it really mean an anchor, or is it only a symbol? It might be a symbol for the sea, or a ship, or even for hope. Do you understand me now, fat-head?"

"I see what you are driving at, but I have no ideas on the subject at all."

In truth my eyes were more on Betty than on the paper. The solution of cryptograms had lost all charm for me at the moment. To watch Betty knit her fair brows and purse her pretty lips interested me to the exclusion

of all thought of such a mundane affair as treasure.

"If only we had some idea of the system on which the thing was made!" exclaimed Betty.

I chuckled contentedly.

"What does it matter to us?" I said. "Let the Tanishes worry it out among themselves. It is they who will profit by it if ever the treasure is found. *We* don't stand to gain a sou!"

"Who ever hunted treasure for the sake of the mere filthy lucre?" demanded Betty in mock anger. "I am as keen as if it were all to be mine. I must have a copy of the little pictures. Mr Morgan won't mind. Let's make it now. It need only be very rough."

So I pulled out an old envelope and made a sketch of the diagrams on the back of it for her.

"By the way," I said as I handed it to her, "why is Morgan so open and talkative about all this? It is the sort of thing that one keeps to oneself."

"That is easily explained. Mr Morgan is a good judge of character. He knows perfectly well that his secret is safe with us. Neither of us is in the least likely to let it

go any further. As for wanting to give each of the Tanishes a copy of this—that is only his sporting instinct. Your Mr Morgan is a real good sport !”

“Perhaps you are right, Betty,” I agreed. “The same reason, namely, that it is not likely to go any further, compels me to tell you something that I have kept to myself so far.”

“Go ahead,” said Betty. “I shan’t give you away.”

“It is something that I can’t understand. When I told you how I had found Roy’s wife wounded in the wood, I did not mention the fact that at the time corresponding to the shot I heard in the darkness, the Laird was out with a shot-gun. I found that out from Marigold. When he came in he was very irritable, as you know, because it was then that he turned your father out of the house.”

“And you think it was the Laird who shot Marie ?” asked Betty, her eyes wide with surprise.

“I must admit that, until to-day, I have suspected him of it. But now that you have discovered that these two are quite friendly, my theory seems incredible ; and if so, who shot Roy’s wife in the wood ?”

"It might have been an accident. Some poacher——"

"Too early in the evening for a poacher, I am afraid. To me there seem only to be two likely persons. Until now I have suspected the Laird; but after what you have found out to-night, does it not seem probable that the Laird and Marie met in the wood by appointment, and that Roy, discovering this, fired the shot in a moment of wild rage? He may even have intended to hit his father. That would account for the state of mind he was in when I found him."

"It's all theory, Bob," said Betty, shaking her head. "You haven't really got evidence on which to suspect either of them. I should hate to think that either Roy or his father had taken to manslaughter. I have known them both all my life, and with Roy I have always been friendly."

I said no more at the time, but the problem worried me. Some one had shot Marie Tanish, and it seemed to me that one or other of these two men must be guilty.

Betty and I continued to talk things over for some time, and before we parted



it was arranged that I should come into Kilbrennan as often as it was possible for me to get away, in order that there should be no delay if Morgan left a message for me.

As I walked the rest of the way back to Hopeton alone, I pondered on all I had heard and speculated on what was likely to happen.

I had to see Marigold alone and give her the copy of the little pictures. How much should I tell her? The more I thought of it, the more convinced I became that my best plan was to tell her as much as possible of Morgan. She might then see him in a better light. I felt interested in his love for her; and so much had the man's quiet strength of purpose impressed me, that I was sure in my heart that what he wanted he would get in the end.

Of one thing I was certain. Marigold would not keep the cipher to herself. Morgan had left her free to show it to the Laird, and there could be no doubt that she would do so. How he would act it was impossible to guess. If he had really a secret understanding with Roy's wife, would he take her into his confi-

dence and share this latest knowledge with her?

Laird Tanish was a man of such primitive passions and desires that one could not count upon his acting according to any conventional principles. I felt that if he imagined that he had the key to the treasure in his hand, he was quite capable of ignoring any arrangement he had come to with Roy's wife.

And she? This Belgian woman of the pale face and dark hair was to me a mysterious figure. For myself, I had seen her only in a moment of stress; but all I had heard and all I had deduced made me think of her as one whom it would be unwise to trust far. She had, apparently, played a double game with Roy and his father. She had surreptitiously married the son in the father's absence. She had stolen from the Laird the only paper he possessed bearing upon the treasure, but she had not disclosed her theft to her husband. Now it seemed almost as if she were in league with the Laird against Roy.

Did she realise that the key to the mystery was in the hands of Morgan? Probably it was she who had originated his invitation to Blackdykes, with a view to finding out what he knew.

Where did Roy stand in all this muddle and intrigue? He seemed to be the only one who knew nothing of the Hopeton treasure. Things were in train around him of which he had not an inkling. But as I pondered over the ins and outs of the affair, it seemed to me that here was a sleeping volcano which, when roused, it might be impossible to control.

Betty had told me something of his character. He was honest and open, if hot-headed. How would he act if he found that his wife had a secret understanding with his father—if he discovered that she was no better than a common thief—if it turned out that the Laird was responsible for the wound in Marie's breast?

There was fear in my heart as I thought of these possibilities.

As I neared Hopeton I cast my speculations behind me. After all, it was none of my business. I was only the tutor of a child who, at least, was clear of all these complications. I had a message to deliver to Marigold, and once that was off my mind I had no further responsibility.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE first thing I did upon my return to Hopeton was to retire to my room and execute a careful copy of the little pictures for my own use. Problems—particularly chess problems—had always intrigued me, and I was determined to test my ingenuity on this cipher. In making a copy for myself I was doing nothing underhand, for Morgan had entrusted me with his secret without reservation. Should I succeed in solving the problem I would immediately hand over the solution to him. I had no personal claim upon the treasure—if it existed.

The next thing was to make an opportunity to see Marigold privately. I knew that as soon as supper was over I should have to sit down to chess with the Laird, so there was nothing for it but to leave my interview with Marigold until next morning.

At supper I was relieved to find the Laird quite himself. It proved that he and Roy had not met. He was in one of his most genial humours, when one would have taken him for a type of the best of country gentry. After supper he sat down to the chess table, nothing dismayed by his many defeats, and as keen as ever upon the wellnigh hopeless task of beating me.

Chess is a game which requires an almost complete mental concentration, and I soon noticed that the Laird's mind was not as devoted to the pieces on the board as usual. Though keen to win, his thoughts would wander off to another subject, so that he made blunders quite below his usual form. I could have cornered him early in the game, but it was not policy to beat him too easily. I did not want him to lose his interest in chess, as it gave me a hold upon him which I could not otherwise hope to retain.

Little as he guessed it, I had a pretty fair idea of the subject of his thoughts. I would have given much to have known more of them. That his compact with his daughter-in-law was in his mind there could be no doubt, but the compact itself was



beyond my knowledge, though not out of reach of my curiosity.

"Ah! Tch, tch, stupid!" he exclaimed at last. "You've got me again, Seaton! I didn't see the object of that king's knight there. But it was a fine game, a fine game. Why, it's past eleven! Time for bed, I suppose."

I yawned, wished him good-night, and taking my candle from the hall table, went off to my room. I did not go to bed at once, however. My mind was too full of the little pictures. I had them out again, and by the dim light of my candle I pored over their obscurities.

I had not much success. In addition to the Hopeton crest at top and bottom, I made out what I took to be an anchor, but I could attach little meaning to that. The three rows of zigzag lines near the top of the paper reminded me of the representations of the sea, as it is shown in old woodcuts. Thus I had two symbols suggesting the sea. Framed in a square of stars appeared what might be a pile of rocks.

I determined that next day I would carry my copy to the shore, and seek inspiration there.

I suppose I must have spent quite half an

hour over the puzzle, when I became aware of movements in the hall below.

"The Laird must have sat late," I thought, and pictured him hovering over the chess-board, playing over the game he had lost, minus the mistakes he had made. I knew every one else had gone to bed long before he and I had finished our game, for ten o'clock was considered a late hour at Hopeton.

I listened, expecting each moment to hear his footsteps pass my door as he went to his room, but instead of that I heard certain muffled sounds from the hall, ending in the creaking of the big house door. Then a click, as if the door had been quietly closed.

I blew out my candle and listened. Had some one gone out, or had some-one been let in? That point was soon settled. The sounds in the hall ceased, and I heard the faint crunching of the loose gravel in the carriage-drive. I stepped to my window and, pulling the curtain aside, peered out. There was no moon, but it was a clear starry night, and it was easy to distinguish a dark object, which must be a human figure, moving down the drive. I could not see clearly enough to make out who it was, but there

could be little doubt that it was the Laird himself.

Where could he be going? What could be his purpose? Perhaps, strictly speaking, it was none of my business, but I could not let it go at that. I knew that his sole interest, outside of chess, was the mystery of the treasure, and that this midnight expedition must be in some way connected with it. I could do no harm by following him, and I felt that I might learn something that would be of value to Marigold.

My decision was soon taken. I slipped on a dark overcoat and a cap, and ran silently downstairs, carrying my boots in my hand. I managed to open the door more quietly than my predecessor had done, and having paused to pull on my boots, I crossed the gravel as quietly as possible and started off running down the grass margin of the drive.

Soon I heard footsteps, and slackened my pace. Occasionally when a break occurred in the thick avenue of trees, I could see a dim dark figure ahead of me in the gloom, but mostly I had to be guided by the footsteps upon the gravel.

Out upon the highroad beyond there was more light, but this was rather a disadvantage than otherwise, for it made it more

difficult for me to follow unobserved. I kept well in under the dark shadow of the hedge, however, and though I stumbled occasionally upon the uneven ground, I managed to keep within sight or sound of my quarry.

We did not follow the main road far. About a third of a mile down the road the sound of footsteps ceased, and, peering ahead, I could see no sign of the dark shadowy figure upon the road. For the moment I thought I had lost him, and then I realised that just ahead lay the spot where the path branched off towards the fox-cover—the very path that I always chose for my excursions into Kilbrennan.

I hurried forward, forgetting my discretion in my anxiety to recover the scent. There was a low stile separating the main road from the by-path, and I had crossed it, and was peering eagerly ahead, when some large black object flashed through the sky immediately above me—I was conscious of a terrific crash upon my head—and I fell stunned across the path.

I was not knocked entirely senseless, but was dazed and stupefied by the blow, and badly shaken by the shock of my fall. I saw dimly a dark form looming over me, and guessed from the pose that he was pre-

paring to launch another blow at my head. I could see his raised arms against the blue-black luminous sky, and some huge weapon suspended over me.

"Hold!" I shouted hoarsely, just in time to prevent a repetition of the blow that had felled me.

"Who are you, then, and what right have you to track me like a thief?"

It was the voice of the Laird. The weapon was lowered, and a moment later an electric torch was flashed in my face.

"Seaton! God, I thought it was Roy!"

I was still so dazed with the blow that I made no attempt to reply, or to rise to my feet.

"What the devil do you mean by following me? Can't I take a quiet stroll before going to bed without being watched like a lunatic? What right have you to interest yourself in my affairs? I would have you remember that you are nothing but a paid servant here—paid to do what you are told—not to dog your master's steps, or listen at keyholes, like a slattern slandering scullery-maid!"

When the Laird grew angry he generally became rather loose in his expressions. Even in my dazed condition I realised that I must



not sit quiet under his denunciations, or I would for ever lose what influence I had gained over him. I struggled to my feet with some difficulty, my head pulsating with pain.

"You have no right to talk to me like that," I exclaimed in a tone that matched his. "What you mean by this unprovoked assault on me I have no idea, but if you were a younger man I should not stop to argue with you about it."

"Unprovoked assault!" he repeated. "Unprovoked! When I am dogged from my own house as if I were a burglar, or worse!"

"And how should I know who it was who slipped out at midnight and made off into the darkness?" I demanded. "Is it not natural enough, if I have the interests of the family at heart, that I should follow such a mysterious character?"

He seemed somewhat taken aback at this view of the case, and by the fact that I adopted his own bullying manner, but he would not climb down all at once.

"No man has a right to follow me in such an underhand way," he repeated, but with less emphasis and conviction.

"If your own behaviour were less open to suspicion," I replied, "an incident of

this kind could not occur. Would an innocent person lie in wait behind a hedge and fell a man on suspicion of following him? Surely only a guilty conscience——”

“No, no, Seaton! you assume too much,” the Laird interrupted, obviously taken aback by my accusations. “There’s nothing suspicious about a man taking a breath of fresh air before he goes to bed. As to—to this—accident, you must admit that nobody likes to feel that he is being shadowed. Fortunately there’s no great harm done, so we can more or less cry quits.”

No great harm done! The Laird did not own my aching head, or he might not have been so off-hand. I pointed this out somewhat forcibly, and actually wrung a kind of apology from him.

“We’ve both made mistakes,” he said. “You followed me thinking I was a burglar or something of the sort, and I took you for—for—well, let us say it was a case of mistaken identity on both sides.”

I remembered his words—“God, I thought it was Roy!” and wondered what would have been the upshot if it had indeed been Roy who had fallen beneath his blow.

There was nothing to be gained by pro-

longing the interview. I could not hope to discover anything further. As a matter of form I asked the Laird if he was returning to the house.

"I think I'll continue my stroll," he answered. "Don't let me keep you from your bed, though. And accept my thanks for your interest in the family welfare. It has had a poor return to-night, but at least you did what you thought right. I'm sorry about your head. Good-night."

"Good-night," I echoed, and, turning on my heel, I started back towards Hopeton. I looked back once, and saw the dark indistinct figure of the Laird standing where I had left him. Evidently he meant to make sure that he was alone before he resumed his evening stroll.

I felt not only physically but mentally uncomfortable. My head throbbed as if the top had been lifted off it, but what hurt me more was the feeling that the Laird had thoroughly got the better of me. I had walked into a trap like a born bungler. My only comfort was that I had convinced him that I had done it innocently—that I was more fool than knave.

As I walked back in this ignominious fashion my head began to clear, though it

was still painful. There was one point that had intrigued me ever since the Laird's attack, and suddenly I solved the puzzle.

What was the strange weapon with which he had struck me down? Now that my senses were clear again, I could see it silhouetted against the deep blue-black sky, as surely as though it had been daylight. It was a spade! The flat of it had struck me down, but I firmly believed that that was due to luck, and not to any forbearance on the part of my assailant.

Spades, however, are not common objects of the countryside, nor do elderly gentlemen arm themselves with such weapons as a measure of self-protection. Where, then, could the Laird be going, close upon midnight, carrying such a tool with him? The obvious answer to that question was—treasure-seeking!

Yet it seemed absurd! The Laird could have no definite idea as to the location of the treasure. That could only be obtained from Hamish's cipher. Surely he would not go out digging indiscriminately about the countryside—more especially on a dark moonless night!

The only other clue that I had was the direction in which he had gone, and even

that was very indefinite. He had turned off from the main road towards the fox-cover, which would suggest that he was making for Kilbrennan — or Blackdykes. But assuming that he had become aware of my presence early in my pursuit, he would naturally have turned into the by-path in order to lie in wait for me. Altogether, then, I was quite at a loss to account for my employer's midnight expedition, and I returned to Hopeton feeling very far from satisfied with myself.

Evidently I was a failure as a sleuth. I had acquired a cracked crown—I had put myself in a false position with the Laird and risked losing my influence over him—and I had learnt nothing.

Fortunately I had at least had forethought enough to leave the door unlatched when I went out, so I was able to return to my room unheard.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR the first time since my arrival in the North, the Laird did not put in an appearance at breakfast.

"Father is not feeling well this morning," Marigold explained, as she took her place at the foot of the table. "He complains of a touch of rheumatism."

I expressed regret, and congratulated myself upon the opportunity afforded me of speaking to Marigold alone. Duncan had his meals with the housekeeper, Mrs Cunningham, so we were quite by ourselves.

"I have a message for you, Miss Tanish," I began.

Marigold looked up with a show of interest, and just a touch of a quizzical smile.

"Indeed! From Betty?"

"No. From another friend of yours. But what made you think it must be Betty?"

Marigold laughed lightly.

"I guessed the person whom you were most likely to have seen lately."

I thought it best to leave this topic and get back on the main line.

"No, it was not Betty. I met Jabez Morgan yesterday!"

A deep flush flooded Marigold's face, and she looked down quickly as if to hide the expression in her eyes. Then the blood flowed back, and left her paler than before.

"Jabez Morgan here!" she exclaimed. "Does my father know?"

"No. Morgan leaves it entirely to your discretion as to his being told. Will you hear the message?"

Marigold was silent for a little while. I would have given much to know what was passing through her mind. At last she looked up and met my eyes.

"I think I can trust you, Dr Seaton, to have brought me no message that will not . . . interest me."

"Good!" I answered. "In the first place, I am commissioned to give you this."

I placed the copy of the cipher before her, and watched her expression as she examined it.

"What is it? A joke?" she asked, after a puzzled look at the paper.

"No joke, but the key to the treasure that your father has been searching for so long."

"What do you know of it?" demanded Marigold, quite taken aback.

"Morgan has told me the whole story," I replied. "I understand now the meaning of your journey to America. He has been very open with me, even to the extent of showing me this key to the treasure. He wished you to understand that he has no idea of the meaning of this, and that you have the same chance of solving it as he has himself. He has given the paper to you, but you are quite at liberty to pass it on to Laird Tanish if you wish."

"And for all these favours—what does he ask in return?" Marigold's tone was suspicious. Evidently she did not trust Morgan.

"Nothing," I replied. "He asked me to say that it would be a great pleasure to him if you would meet him and talk the matter over with him, but he has given you this copy of the cipher freely and without conditions."

"I have no wish to meet Mr Morgan," said Marigold coldly.

"Very well," I answered promptly, "I shall let him know."

"One moment—where is he?" she asked hesitatingly.

"I am not permitted to tell you where he is staying, but he is in the neighbourhood, and I can carry a message to him. He will then meet you at any spot you care to appoint."

"I have said that I have no wish to meet him," she insisted.

"I know," I agreed, and awaited her next remark.

"What good could come from such a meeting?" she asked, as if speaking to herself.

I merely raised my eyebrows slightly. It seemed to me that the best way to help Morgan's cause was to make Marigold advocate it herself.

"He could tell me no more than you have done already."

"No, of course not!" I agreed.

"Yet I believe you are wrong," she retorted illogically. "There are many things that are not clear. What does he mean by sending this to me rather than to my father? What does he propose should be done with the treasure if one of us finds it? The more

one thinks of it the more necessary it seems that some one should see Mr Morgan again."

I could not resist the temptation to answer, "I could take a message."

I could afford to do so now, for I was sure in my mind that Marigold was determined to meet Morgan. Perhaps I was influenced a little by a desire to get my own back for Marigold's insinuation about Betty earlier in our interview.

Marigold was rather taken aback by my proposal. She hesitated before she replied.

"Perhaps that would hardly be courteous," she said at last, with heightened colour. "Mr Morgan has been generous, we must admit, in sending me this cipher. If it can be managed, it would be better that I should thank him myself."

"It can easily be arranged," I replied. "You have only to mention time and place, and Morgan will be there."

"I think I had better see him before I speak to father of this. In that case, it would be well that my father should not accidentally find us together. . . . He would misunderstand."

"I quite agree with you, Miss Tanish.



How would the fox-cover do? It is not very far away, and it is secluded."

"Very well. Make it the fox-cover. When could Mr Morgan be there?"

"I think I can have him on the spot by half-past two this afternoon."

I was ready with my answers, for in expectation of Marigold agreeing to meet Morgan, I had previously fixed up the appointment in my mind.

"Thank you, Dr Seaton," she said. "I shall leave the arrangements to you, then."

Notwithstanding her apparent coldness, and her efforts to appear uninterested, I felt sure, by the unusual flush on her cheeks, and by the light in her eye, that Marigold was quite excited at the thought of meeting Morgan again. After all, the little man had succeeded in impressing his personality upon her, notwithstanding his apparent insignificance.

In the hall I met my pupil and patient, Duncan.

"Well, boy," I asked him, "are you game for a tramp over the hills this morning?"

"Yes, sir," he replied brightly.

He and I were good friends. I had thoroughly gained his confidence, and the

look of fear had vanished from his eyes. He was beginning to look strong and healthy from the open-air life I led him. Although his father made no remark, I felt sure that he had noted the change.

We set out by the old Roman Road for Kilbrennan, for I must see Betty as early as possible, in order that Morgan could be warned of the appointment I had made for him.

By a lucky chance, whom should I find waiting on the doctor's doorstep when we got to the village, but Morgan himself. I sent Duncan to make a few small purchases for me in the local shops, and followed him in as the maid opened the door.

"Good morning, Seaton," said he, as we met in the hall. "Any news?"

"Good news, from your point of view," I replied.

"Ha, ha! The conspirators," exclaimed Betty, coming out of the dining-room to meet us. "Come along inside and let me hear everything. I am consumed by curiosity since I was let into all your secrets."

Morgan grinned cheerfully, and we sat down to discuss developments.

"First of all—your news, Seaton," Morgan demanded eagerly.

"The lady grants you an interview," I replied.

"You are a benefactor, Seaton! However did you manage it?"

"Your true diplomat never exposes his methods," I answered. "Be thankful that I have succeeded, and don't inquire into the process."

"This mystery business begins to grow on one," declared Betty. "Here is Bob Seaton, as innocent and harmless a young man as you could wish to see, trying to run a side-line in secrets of his own."

"I have another one, too," I admitted. "I had an adventure last night—or perhaps I should say a disaster."

"Tell us," demanded Betty peremptorily.

So I described to them how I had dogged the footsteps of the Laird, and with what result. I did not get much sympathy. Betty had a delightfully musical infectious laugh, and she used it so effectively that not only did Morgan join with her in laughing over my discomfiture, but I myself was forced to share in the merriment—if somewhat ruefully.

"Some diplomat—the Squire," declared Morgan. "There's nothing to beat a sock on the head with a blunt instrument when it

comes to persuasion. I hope you didn't adopt his methods to gain me my interview with Marigold !”

“It's all very well to laugh,” I grumbled, “but it hurts even now !”

My doleful tone increased their hilarity.

“You will never be a Sherlock Holmes, Bob,” declared Betty. “I don't believe even Dr Watson would have run into such an obvious trap.”

When they had tired of bantering me over my failure, we returned to the business of the day.

“How did you get on at Blackdykes, Mr Morgan ?” asked Betty.

“I drove over with my traps, after you left me yesterday. Cousin Roy and his good lady are very hospitable, and I've got to remember that I'm their guest. In any case, there is nothing to report — except that everything goes to show that Roy and his wife don't hit it. Roy is a fine fellow. I took to him at once ; but I feel sure that, as far as he is concerned, love's young dream is over. As for the lady, I doubt if it ever began. I don't understand Mrs Roy. She treats me as an honoured guest, and all that ; but I should judge her to be a woman who cares for nothing in this

world or the next, except her own interest."

"Poor Marie," murmured Betty. "Yet I am afraid I must agree with you. I could never get on with her, and I felt towards her just what you describe."

"I think she and her husband live in a state of armed neutrality," continued Morgan. "Of course they talk amiably in the presence of a stranger like myself; but I am sure that for some reason Roy has lost confidence in his wife."

"Did you not find it difficult to get away alone this morning?" I asked.

"Not a bit," replied Morgan. "As the distant American relative travelling for pleasure, they have made me free of their house. Roy has duties about the farm, and his wife about the house.—I would only agree to stay with them on the understanding that they made no effort to entertain me."

"Have you shown Roy the little pictures?" asked Betty.

"No. So far I have said nothing. I shall wait until I have had a talk with Marigold. The state of war between Roy and the Squire complicates things. If we could only bring these two together, and



then find this treasure and share it out equally amongst the interested parties, it would be a good job done."

"You will never do that," declared Betty. "The Monster of the Glen hates Roy too much, and I am afraid that your treasure—if it is ever found—is more likely to cause trouble than put an end to it."

"I hope you are wrong, Miss Forbes," said Morgan. "But from the opinion I have formed of you—if you will forgive the liberty—I'd be inclined to back your instincts. However, I do hope you are wrong."

"Anyhow, the treasure is not yet found," said Betty. "Perhaps it would be better if it is never found. Have you solved the little pictures yet, Bob?"

"I thank you for the implied compliment," I answered. "Considering that Morgan has been worrying at the thing for months, and has employed all sorts of experts to solve it for him, you can hardly expect me to work it out in one night."

"Especially as your brains must have been rather shaken up in the course of the evening," said Betty maliciously.

"You treat my adventure as a joke," I protested. "But neither of you has sug-

gested an explanation of the Laird going out at midnight armed with a spade."

"You are right, Seaton," said Morgan. "It's a queer start. I can't make head or tail of it."

"I suppose he can't possibly have found the treasure without the little pictures?" suggested Betty.

Morgan shook his head.

"You must remember," he said, "that we don't even know for certain that the dollars were planted in this district. They may be anywhere in Scotland. The little pictures are the only chance."

"And I, even if I haven't solved them, have at least a clue," I declared.

"Really, Bob?" exclaimed Betty excitedly. "Tell us!"

"No," I replied. "If you like to come out with me this afternoon, while Morgan is talking to Marigold, we can follow up my clue together."

"Rather!" agreed Betty. "You are a wonderful chap, Bob!"

"Remember," I said cautiously, "it's a very little clue, and it may take us on quite a false scent."

"Never mind. Better that than no scent at all. I am all for treasure-seeking."

Morgan and I left soon after. I found Duncan waiting for me by the village cross, as he had done more than once before. We took Morgan with us by the hill road, and I pointed out the fox-cover and then directed him to Blackdykes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

DINNER was at one o'clock at Hopeton. The Laird put in an appearance, and treated me in his usual friendly manner, making no reference to the incident of the previous night. I inquired after his rheumatism, which, he told me, had improved, but which he meant to humour to the extent of lying down during the afternoon.

This suited my plans excellently. I handed Duncan over to Mrs Cunningham, and soon after two o'clock set out, accompanied by Marigold, over the path which I had already covered in the morning. My companion was silent. I judged her to be busy with her own thoughts.

We were first at the meeting-place, but looking down the grassy slopes towards Blackdykes I could see a small figure that I recognised as Morgan hurrying upwards towards us.

"I shall leave you now, Miss Tanish," I

said. "I have an appointment at Kilbrennan."

Marigold seemed startled. She had evidently counted on my presence to soften the embarrassment of the meeting. She put her hand on my arm for a moment as if to hold me back. Then her pride came to her aid and she withdrew it.

"Very well, Doctor," she said. "If you should chance to see Betty Forbes, give her my love."

"It is strange that you should have mentioned Betty," I returned unabashed, "for it is she whom I am going to meet."

I hurried off as I saw Morgan approaching, and made my way to Kilbrennan, where I found Betty impatiently awaiting me. The old doctor was smoking his after-dinner pipe when I was shown in, and he greeted me heartily.

"An' whaur are you bairns gaun gallivantin' the day?" he asked as he saw Betty put on a wide sun-hat.

"Treasure-hunting, Dad!" answered Betty laughingly.

"Ay, ay, I daursay," said the old man, smiling. "An' you'll no' ha'e faur tae spier for it, I'm thinkin', by the looks o' the pair o' ye."



He looked upon us with an indulgent eye, as he read this meaning into Betty's words. I glanced at her quickly, and a faint flush spread over her face.

"You'll be back tae tea, Seaton?" asked the doctor as we went out.

I thanked him, and followed Betty down the street.

"Now then, Bob, which way?" she asked eagerly, as I joined her.

"Down the Crosland Brae to the shore," I replied.

As we went, Betty continued to ply me with questions, but I refused to be drawn. In truth, it was easy to refuse, for I had nothing to lead me to the sea except the zigzag lines in the cipher and the drawing of the anchor.

Below Kilbrennan the beach is fine sand and pleasant to walk on. Farther north, towards Hopeton, it changes to weedy rocks, with red sandstone cliffs some hundred feet high behind.

We followed the sea for a couple of miles until we reached the outlet of the Hopeton burn, which flowed down through a gap in the cliffs. We had left the region of sandy beach and were now amidst a wilderness of rocks, amongst which were still pools,

in which small fish darted hither and thither.

Betty had discarded her wide hat, which now hung by its ribbons on her arm. Her mass of rich red hair positively glowed in the sun, and her fair face was flushed with the exercise and the strong sea air. I thought of her father's words, and agreed in my mind that I, at least, did not need to search far for treasure. But having found it, dare I claim it as mine?

"Are we getting warm yet, Bob?" she cried, as I paused to look about me. She was poised upon top of a boulder, holding her skirts clasped round her, her face full of eagerness and expectation. For the moment my spirits flagged as I thought how intent she was upon the little pictures. It was the Hopeton treasure alone that was in *her* mind. However, it was too fine a day to be doleful, and Betty's company, even on such an impersonal quest as the treasure, was too merry to let me be long depressed.

"Physically, we are—or, at any rate, I am," I replied. "As to the treasure, I know no more than you. Let's sit down somewhere and follow the little pictures. We

must have a point of vantage from which we can overlook the coast."

"Let's climb to a ledge on the cliff, then," suggested Betty.

The cliffs varied considerably in height and in steepness. In places thick patches of woodland covered the slopes, while the more precipitous portions were bare red rock. We made a survey, and found a slope that we could climb for a distance of perhaps fifty feet. There we came on a level grassy ledge that was just the spot for our purpose.

"Now, let us look at the pictures."

I produced my copy, and we bent over it together.

"My sole reason for bringing you here is these zigzag lines, and the anchor at the bottom," I explained.

"And what is the interpretation thereof?" asked Betty.

"Well, you will find in old woodcuts that the sea is represented by just such lines as these. Add to that the anchor, and you may agree that it was worth our while coming here to see if anything further would suggest itself."

"It's worth having come, because there was nothing better to be done, but it's thin,

Bob, very thin. An anchor suggests ships, and I don't see how that can point to a treasure on land."

"Still, we may be able to see something—some contour of the shore or of the cliffs or of the rocks—that will put us on a further clue. Take this arrangement within the frame of stars. It looks rather like rocks."

"Yes, I thought that when I was examining it last night. It might be a cairn of stones," said Betty. "But every hill-top in the countryside has a cairn on it, so *that* won't help us much."

"I don't agree with you there," I answered. "If we have satisfied ourselves that it is a cairn, we have learnt something definite. It is up to us then to find *which* cairn, for no doubt the little pictures lead to some definite spot."

"I can see some hill-climbing ahead of us if you decide on the cairn theory. But that does not fit in with your other picture of the sea, because there are no cairns about here. They are all inland."

"That's true," I admitted.

"There is another thing," said Betty. "You are taking it that the little pictures represent actual places, but may it not be

done on other lines altogether? You know those puzzles where words are represented by pictures, such as 'I saw the cow,' where you draw an eye, and a saw, and a cow, and only print the word 'the.' Don't you think it may be done like that?"

I shook my head.

"I don't think so," I said. "For one thing, there are not enough pictures for that, and for another, it does not seem likely that Hamish would have seen anything of the sort. Again, remember he says, 'Follow the little pictures,' which infers that it is the pictures themselves that will lead us to the treasure. I take them to form a kind of continuous map or plan."

"As we have come to the sea, then, let's try to find something that will fit in. We can stalk the cairns another day."

We expended a vast amount of ingenuity with very little result. For myself, I was perfectly content to lie on the soft grass of the ledge and listen to Betty's musical voice, or watch the varied expressions come and go upon her face. The treasure might go hang, for me.



Now this part of the coast, which we overlooked, was, as a rule, about as solitary a spot as one could expect to find in a civilised country. It was several miles from the nearest village, and not a farm-house nor other habitation was to be seen. It surprised me, then, to see figures moving on the shore. I had been here several times—with Duncan or with Betty—and never yet had I seen the solitude disturbed. I pointed the figures out to Betty and we discussed them together.

There were two—a man and a woman. They clambered along over the rocks as we had done ourselves, coming gradually nearer to us, until they ended by sitting down upon a rock almost directly beneath.

“Why, it’s Marigold and Mr Morgan!” exclaimed Betty.

She was right. They were seated close together, their heads bent low over a scrap of paper. Like ourselves, they were following the little pictures. It was strange that they should have been led to the same spot.

We watched them for a few minutes, and then Betty vented a clear “Coo-ee,” and the pair started up like conspirators. We clambered down from our point of

vantage and joined them on the rocks beneath.

It was a different Marigold who greeted me from her whom I had known in the past. There was a light and life in her eyes, a vivacity in her face and pose, that were a revelation to me. This was the real Marigold, from whom sorrow and dread had lifted their blighting fingers.

"What do you mean by jumping our claim?" she cried as we approached. "You have the whole countryside to search, yet you must choose the very spot that Jabez has marked out. I believe you have tracked us."

"It is our claim really," said Betty. "We were here first, and Bob found the spot all out of his own head."

"Struck any treasure, Seaton?" asked Morgan, who positively beamed through his spectacles.

"Not exactly," I had to admit.

"Dear, dear, dear! What a coincidence. Neither have we! I suppose it was the little picture of the zigzag sea that brought you here?"

"It was," said Betty. "I don't think much of it myself," she added with candour.

"Neither do I," agreed Marigold. "If

our ancestor had intended to take the money across the water to Bonnie Prince Charlie, he might have hidden it by the shore. But Jabez says he meant it to be used over here during the rising, so there was no special object in bringing it as far as this. It is much more likely to be in or near the house itself."

"There ought to be a secret passage or a priest's room or something at Hopeton," said Betty.

"I don't think there is much chance of that," said Marigold. "It is quite a plain straightforward house."

"By the way," I asked, turning to Morgan, "what have you decided about the Laird? Is he to be told?"

"Yes," he answered. "I am going to try to make up to him. He is not to know that Marigold has had the cipher. I shall get away from Blackdykes—go up to Glasgow and write to the Squire from a hotel there. I shall offer to show him the cipher, suggest that the past be forgotten, and propose that we attempt to solve the thing together. I am hoping that he will then invite me to Hopeton. If the opportunity occurs, Marigold will suggest it to him."

"It seems a very good plan," I agreed. "What about Roy? Will he not be in the running at all?"

"Jabez is very sanguine," said Marigold. "He thinks that if once he can get on good terms with father, he may effect a reconciliation."

"You see, I've been pumping Roy a bit," explained Morgan. "I believe that if the old man can be brought round, Roy will not hang back. He is fond of his sister, and doesn't like being cut off from her. We know that the Squire is on friendly terms with Roy's wife, so the main cause of dissension is at an end. Why keep up the feud, then? We'll all be as merry as grigs in another month!"

"I hope you may be right," I said doubtfully.

From all I knew of Laird Tanish, I was convinced that such a reconciliation would never take place, but it seemed a pity to damp Morgan's enthusiasm.

Betty and I left the others to continue their investigations, while we returned to Kilbrennan for tea. We were certainly no nearer to the treasure, but each meeting drew us more closely together. We were friends, in the fullest acceptance of the

word. Strangely enough, the thought did not bring me the satisfaction it should have done. To have Betty for a friend—no, I knew by this time that it was not enough.



## CHAPTER XX.

A FEW days later, the Laird received a letter from Morgan. Marigold was first in the breakfast-room, and she recognised the writing on the envelope. When I entered she gave me the news in a hurried whisper, for already we heard her father's footsteps on the stair.

The worst of it was that the Laird received several letters that morning, and by some evil chance he kept Morgan's to the last. It was a trying moment for both of us. We attempted to keep up an indifferent conversation, but had the Laird been more acute he might easily have noticed the lack of point in our remarks.

I fully expected that the opening of Morgan's letter would be followed by an explosion of anger, and I believe now that we escaped it by a very narrow margin. As the Laird read the first few lines he looked merely puzzled. He turned over quickly,

glanced at the signature—and immediately his brows drew down over his eyes, his jaws set, and his lips became a mere line. It was then that I expected him to burst into a fit of rage, for I knew well how he hated Morgan. Marigold and I unconsciously let our conversation drop. Fortunately the Laird was too deep in his own thoughts to notice our preoccupation.

He turned back to the beginning of the letter and read it through with lowered brows. The fingers of his unoccupied hand tapped restlessly upon the table-cloth. Still I waited for the explosion, but still it was delayed.

The Laird ate no more. He sat gloomily thoughtful for some minutes, and then abruptly rose and left the room without a word.

Our eyes met across the table: Marigold's were puzzled and anxious—my own, I fear, expressed the "I told you so" attitude.

"What is he going to do?" asked Marigold, in a voice little above a whisper.

"Ignore Morgan's letter, or write a most scathing reply," I hazarded.

"I don't like his silence—the controlled yet angry look of his face," said Marigold anxiously.

"Of course we must remember that the letter came as rather a shock to him. He had no reason to expect a message from Morgan," I said. "He may come round in an hour or two."

I said this more to cheer Marigold up than because I believed it, and my surprise was great when my words came true immediately after.

Laird Tanish came into the room noisily. He stood at the head of the table and smiled down slyly at his daughter.

"You'll never guess from whom I've had a letter this morning," he began.

"You had better tell me, then," replied Marigold, forcing herself to speak in the same light tone, though I could see she was nervous.

"What do you say to—your American cousin, Jabez Morgan?"

"Mr Morgan! How dare he!" exclaimed Marigold, with well-simulated heat.

"Tut, tut! You mustn't be so hard on the man," said her father, with a tolerant air that sat ill on him. "After all, he's a blood relation, and as he's in the country we can hardly do less than ask him down to stay with us."

Had we been in ignorance of the contents of Morgan's letter we might well have been astounded at this change of face. As it was, Marigold thought it advisable to remark upon it.

"Surely he would not come," she said. "You did not part on the best of terms."

"Ah! But he's made amends. We shall be the best of friends now—the best of friends!"

The Laird, somewhat to my astonishment, laughed long and loudly. The chance of obtaining the cipher from Morgan seemed to have changed him completely. Though he appeared so jovial and hearty, there was a strained air about him that I could not account for.

"You see, my girl, he offers to remove my cause of complaint against him—you know what that is!" the Laird continued, rubbing his hands in a pleased way. "I must have you in this, Seaton. A man with your skill at chess should be able to work out the problem we have before us."

Again he laughed loudly. It began to get on my nerves, for I could not see enough reason for it. Certainly he had gained the object that he had desired so long, but that hardly seemed a matter for laughter.

"I am fond of problems," I replied. "Is the one in question a twister?"

"You shall see it, my boy, you shall see it. We'll all have a turn at it! But I must be off and write Morgan's invitation."

He went away rubbing his hands and chuckling to himself with satisfaction.

"It has worked all right," exclaimed Marigold, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Jabez understands him better than I thought."

"Yes, he seems to have taken it well," I answered. "I am glad I am to be officially in the know. It would have been awkward if I had had to pretend to know nothing."

"Jabez had thought of that," exclaimed Marigold. "He intended to propose that your advice should be asked, but now there is no need."

I was passing through the hall a little later, when the Laird heard me, and called me into his room.

"I want to have a chat with you, Seaton. Sit you down at your ease, for what I have to say will take some time."

I took him at his word, for I guessed that I was to hear the whole story of the Hopeton treasure from his point of view.

I was right. Except that he never intro-



duced the name of his son's wife or mentioned the loss of the Flemish document, he told me essentially what has already been set down here. Naturally he did not refer to his two attempts to steal the cipher from Morgan. He merely told me that they had disagreed upon terms, but that now their differences were over, and that Morgan had agreed to take a share of whatever might be found.

Of course I readily promised my assistance in reading the little pictures, and expressed great curiosity to see them.

"You shall, Seaton. Oh, but it will be a great game the solving of this cipher!" he exclaimed, and laughed heartily with regular schoolboy glee.

He maintained the same high spirits during the three days that we awaited Morgan's arrival. There was no more chess in the evenings, but instead he talked constantly of the treasure, estimated its value, how long it would take us to find it, how we should set about the solution of the cryptogram. There was but the one topic of conversation in the house, and to that there was no end. Never have I seen a man so changed in a day.

When Morgan arrived the Laird met him in the car at Kilbrennan, and they drove up

to the house the best of friends. Morgan's scheme of reconciliation seemed to be working well, yet I could not help wondering—knowing the Laird's violent temper as I had good cause to do—how long his present frame of mind would last.

Morgan greeted Marigold and me as if he had seen nothing of us since our voyage from the States. One thing worried me a little—the fact that Duncan had seen Morgan in Kilbrennan. However, I knew that the boy was very unlikely to make any remark in the presence of his father, and I took the precaution to send him off on some errand as soon as I could.

“Dear, dear, dear! Now, who would ever have thought to see us all sitting round comfortable and pleasant like this?” said Morgan as we sat down to dinner. “Delightful, I call it!”

The Laird laughed. I had heard more laughter during these last few days than all the time I had been at Hopeton.

“Ah, Morgan, we're not so black as we're painted, eh?” he said. “Now when are we to see our ancestor's message? You needn't mind Seaton; he's one of the family now.”

I was struck suddenly with the idea that the Laird was only waiting to get the cipher

from Morgan, and that when he had succeeded he would turn him out neck and crop. It was the Laird's expression as he glanced at his guest that put this idea into my head. It seemed so much at variance with his jovial words and laughter.

Morgan seemed to notice nothing of this. He was beaming amiably at the success of his plans.

"Yes, yes, I've brought the cipher," he answered. "Whether we shall be able to make anything of it remains to be seen. I've worried over it enough without success."

He pulled out a pocket-book and produced from it a number of copies of the little pictures, one of which he handed round to each of us, as though we had never seen it before. The Laird bent over his with great interest. I knew from what Morgan had told me that he had seen it once before, when he had rifled Morgan's desk, but he could not have had time to examine it thoroughly.

"A strange document," he said, chuckling to himself. "Hamish must have been having a joke at the expense of his descendants. Maybe we'll have the laugh of him yet."

"I hope we shall," agreed Morgan. "We

must all set our minds to it. I count a lot on you, Seaton. You've got a lot of spare grey matter. Either you or the Squire, being chess players, should get at the root of this thing pretty quick."

All the while I was awaiting a change of face on the part of my employer. I could not believe that his friendliness to Morgan was genuine. Yet nothing happened. I had to admit, at last, that I was wrong.

Day followed day, and the intimacy between the two increased constantly. Often they would be closeted together for hours, discussing, and attempting to solve, the cipher. Sometimes I would be called in to consult on some theory or suggestion, but more often they were alone together, and the sound of the Laird's laughter would echo through the hall. He was in a continual state of high spirits. Marigold was delighted at the change in him, but for myself I could not help thinking it too sudden to be wholesome. It jarred upon me to hear his loud laughter about the house, and instead of thinking that things were going better, I had a kind of presentiment that they were going worse, though all the evidence was against my feeling.

Whenever Morgan could get away from

the Laird, he and Marigold scoured the country hunting for clues to the little pictures. The Laird seemed to look upon this growing intimacy with favour, and I even heard him on more than one occasion suggesting such excursions.

I am afraid that during this period I was guilty of neglecting my duties to some extent. Duncan had improved so much in health that he did not require much of my attention, certainly; and that must be my excuse for spending so many of my afternoons with Betty Forbes. She and I roamed the country together, as keen upon the discovery of the treasure as those who had a personal interest in it,—at least Betty was keen, and I was ready for anything that would keep me in her company.

I told her of all that was happening at Hopeton, and she was as sceptical as myself of the Laird's reformation.

"I shall have to call him the Monarch of the Glen instead of the Monster, after all, if this goes on," she commented. "But it can't go on. A Laird Tanish who roars as gently as a sucking dove is inconceivable. Either he is ill, or he is up to mischief of some kind. Probably he is using Mr Morgan to help him find the treasure, and then



when it is found he will turn and rend him. However, perhaps it isn't fair to condemn him when the evidence is all in his favour."

The evidence was still further in his favour a couple of days after Betty used these words.

I returned to Hopeton after a further investigation of the beach—which, like our other excursions, brought us no nearer our goal—to find Roy and his Belgian wife seated at tea with the family. The jovial laughter of the Laird rang through the room as I entered.

## CHAPTER XXI.

I WAS so taken aback by this evidence of Laird Tanish's reformation that I stood in the doorway looking stupidly at the assembled company. Seeing my confusion, the Laird came to my assistance.

"Come along in and join the family party, Seaton," he cried in hearty tones. "You've never met my son Roy, but you two should be friends. You're of an age and both decent lads. And here is Mrs Tanish, my daughter-in-law. Come and sit beside her and get known to each other. Ah! this is a great day, a great day, Morgan, and it's all your doing. You've got something to be proud of here."

The Laird rubbed his hands and beamed upon the company in the best of spirits, but it did not take me long to discern that he was the only person present who was at his ease. Marigold and Morgan seemed so overcome by the success of their own plan

that they sat silent, as if afraid it was all too good to be true.

Young Roy did his best to meet his father's advances, but there was a strained air about his remarks that showed that he too was ill at ease. Neither did his wife do much to add to the harmony of the meeting.

I saw her now for the first time in normal circumstances, and I was not prepossessed in her favour. Yet she was a handsome woman in her way—tall and dark, with pale translucent skin and perfectly-formed features. Her eyes were very large and dark, and when turned upon one suddenly they seemed to look past the words upon one's lips to the meaning behind. She had a habit of sudden sidelong glances, very disconcerting to one speaking polite conventionalities.

She was seated upon the Laird's right, Roy upon his left, and as the two men talked she would glance quickly from one to the other, then droop her long dark lashes as if to hide what she had learnt.

I made several attempts to engage her in conversation, but without success. She answered me in monosyllables, hardly hearing my words, and turned her glance again

upon her husband or the Laird. It was a most uncomfortable tea-party.

Afterwards the conversation became more general. We broke up into groups and visited the gardens and the stables. I was able to get the opportunity of a talk with Roy, and found him, as Betty and Morgan had told me, a frank open young man whom I took to at once.

We had wandered about the garden together for some little time, when Roy, after a glance round to see that we were alone, turned our conversation into an intimate groove.

"I have never thanked you," he said, "for your attention to my wife on the—on the—night of her accident."

"Surely that is unnecessary," I replied. "You thanked me at the time, and I was glad to be of service. By the way, did you ever discover the—the cause of the accident?"

He shook his head, and a shadow passed over his face. I thought at that moment how like his father he was.

"No," he said. "The accident so upset my wife's nerves that I have found it best not to refer to it much. She quickly recovered—thanks to your attention—so, as

no harm was done and the subject upset her, I let it drop."

This was not said with the open spontaneous air that had marked his previous conversation. I wondered if he was keeping something back—if he knew more of the affair than he cared to tell me. Of this, at least, I was sure since meeting him—that he had no personal concern in the so-called accident.

As though desirous of getting away from the subject which he had himself introduced, he began at once to speak of the cipher, of which he had heard for the first time that day.

"I hear you are looked upon as the most likely person to solve it, Dr Seaton," he said. "I hope you do. The Tanish family can do with a fresh inflow of capital. We have come down lamentably in the last century or so."

By judicious questioning I soon discovered just what tale had been told to him. Nothing had been said of his wife's part in the early discovery, nor, of course, of her theft of the Flemish paper. To him it was just a straightforward story, discovered by Morgan amongst the old papers of his branch of the family. Whether he connected this in any



way with the paper I had myself handed to him—the paper which had fallen from his wife's bosom—I could not say.

It was evident that my new acquaintance was equally favourably impressed with me—or at least that he was glad to have a friend of the same age and sex as himself—for he was most urgent in his plea that I should visit him at Blackdykes at an early date.

“Now that the governor has forgiven me for marrying to please myself, there can be nothing against it,” he said.

I promised him that it would not be long before I took him at his word.

Later, when Roy had left me and was talking with Morgan and his father indoors, I found Marigold and Marie sitting together upon the lawn. I joined them, intending to enter into their conversation, but I found that I had to make it all myself. My companions were silent. I could feel, as plainly as if they had told me, that they were not in sympathy with each other.

I had not been there more than a few minutes, racking my brains for small-talk, and feeling very uncomfortable, when Mari-

gold made some excuse and went away. The dark eyes of Roy's wife gave me a slow sidelong glance.

"You were embarrassed, to have to make the talk by yourself—yes?" she said, as though in answer to my thoughts. "But it is always so. Marigold and I, we are silent, for we are not sympathetic. You know that?"

This promised to be more embarrassing to me than the other. She spoke calmly, disinterestedly. I cannot reproduce her slight accent, but her English was clear and good, with just a suggestion of strange idiom now and again.

"If it is so, surely it is a pity?" I answered.

"It does not matter," she said calmly. Her pale face was inscrutable. She made no effort to smile, showed no interest even in her own words. "One says that you are very clever, Dr Seaton—that it is you who will read this message from the dead Monsieur Tanish. Is it so?"

"I am afraid they overrate my powers, merely because I happen to play chess well," I answered.

"Perhaps you are too modest. When

you have read the message, what is it that you will do?" she asked, with her great dark eyes upon me.

This habit of turning the eyes alone had a most unpleasant effect. It suggested the underhand, the surreptitious. One felt in the thick of an intrigue, however innocent the conversation. Yet there was something fascinating about it too—a sense of intimacy, perhaps.

"What can I do? I shall hand the solution to the Laird—or Mr Morgan——"

"Or to me?" she interrupted, with eyebrows raised and another sidelong glance.

"It is all the same," I answered cautiously. "All are working together for the same end."

For the first time I heard her laugh—a short hard laugh, with little merriment in it.

"Truly!" she said in her calm voice. "You read characters as well as puzzles, Dr Seaton—yes?"

"I am interested in character, but I do not claim to read it correctly, Mrs Tanish."

"You are too modest," she repeated. "If you read this puzzle as surely as you read

characters—how you will surprise all the world—is it not? And for yourself, you want nothing—no, no!”

I was nettled by her tone, suggesting as it did that I was a self-seeker.

“You are quite right in one thing,” I declared emphatically. “If I should chance to solve this cipher, I expect nothing for myself.”

“That is very well,” she replied. “But I must find my husband and take him home. Do you know, Dr Seaton, I do not think you will find this treasure, although you are so very clever at this game of chess, and although—what is it?—‘all are working together for the same end!’”

“Why do you say that?” I asked. “Do you think the cipher is insoluble?”

“I do not have reasons. We women—we know things without reason—is it not? You call it intuition—or guessing! But sometimes we are right—yes?”

“Sometimes—yes. But in this case I shall do my best to prove you wrong,” I said with a smile.

“We shall see,” she answered, and rising, she left me and went indoors.

One thing was evident—Roy’s wife was as sceptical as myself of the sincerity of this

strange reconciliation. Whether she had more reason for her belief than I, I could not tell.

A few minutes later Roy's trap appeared at the door, and he and his wife brought their visit to a close. Being an outsider, I kept well in the background throughout the farewells. The Laird was still the jovial host. His loud "Ha, ha," rose above all the talk as he beamed down from his position upon the steps of the porch.

"You'll be back soon, bairns," he called. "We have a strong tie now in the Hopeton treasure, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

I saw Jabez Morgan watching this friendly leave-taking with the eye of a successful stage-manager. Everything was going as he had arranged it, and he had some cause for satisfaction.

When the trap had driven off and the Laird and Marigold had gone indoors, he took me by the arm and led me into the garden.

"Well, well, Seaton," he said, "our little plot has gone off top-hole. Here we are, as happy as so many turtle-doves—all ill-feeling dead—the Squire a model for Father Christmas—the fatted calf killed



for the prodigal—in fact, a regular Happy Family!”

“Have you ever been in a travelling menagerie, Morgan?” I asked.

“Dear, dear, dear! How you do wander, Seaton. In what capacity?”

“Merely as a spectator, I mean.”

“I’ve seen Barnum’s show, of course,” said he, looking at me in a puzzled manner.

“But what——”

“It was your reference to a Happy Family that made me think of it. I daresay you remember a cage containing a dog, a cat, a rabbit, a hen, a guinea-pig, and many other creatures that I have forgotten—all cooped up together and labelled ‘Happy Family.’ They all looked the picture of misery, and seemed ready to fly at each other’s throats upon the slightest provocation.”

“And you think——?” Morgan paused and looked at me inquiringly.

I nodded and said nothing.

We walked along for a short time in silence, each of us intent upon his own thoughts. Morgan was the first to speak.

“I hope you are wrong,” he said. “It cost me a lot of hard work to bring the old man round to this. It seemed a good thing

to do, and it was for Marigold's sake I did it. Anyhow, things can hardly be worse than they were before I waltzed in, so I can't have done any harm."

"I am not so sure of that," I said. "Whatever rows there had been were over, and the parties at a safe distance. You have got them into the middle of the ring, ready for the next round."

"You are a croaker, Seaton, a prize croaker." The little man shook me by the arm playfully. "I'm not going to listen to you any more. I've brought this deal off. They are all friends again. We shall find the treasure, and they will all share in it. Why should there be any more trouble?"

"It's in the air," I answered vaguely, and continued more explicitly. "First, there is Laird Tanish, whose wonderful reformation I can't understand. He is always liable to cut up rough. Then we have Roy's wife,—a woman whom I do not trust. I take her to be capable of any mischief. These two have a secret understanding. We know that from what Betty Forbes overheard. Should Roy get to know of that, he becomes the third of my possibilities. Hot-headed and honest, he would not wait for explana-

tions. In fact, Morgan, you have all the ingredients ready to your hand for a fine old flare-up! I can even make a pretty fair guess at the match which will start the conflagration."

"Yes?" said Morgan inquiringly.

"The discovery of the Hopeton Treasure!" I replied.

## CHAPTER XXII.

NOTHING happened during the next few days in fulfilment of my doleful prognostications. There were comings and goings between the two households, and consultations galore on the one burning topic—the little pictures. Roy's wife did not come again to Hopeton, nor did Marigold visit her at Blackdykes, but Roy was over each day, and Morgan and the Laird on more than one occasion went to the farm.

It was about a week after the events narrated in the previous chapter that Morgan came to me in a state of excitement.

"What do you think of this, you old Jeremiah?" he said, shaking me to and fro by the arm—"the Squire has agreed to my engagement to Marigold——"

"Congratulations, my dear fellow," I interrupted, shaking him warmly by the hand. "You are a wonder-worker. I believe after all, Morgan, there is nothing on this earth

that you might want that you wouldn't contrive to get."

"I hope you are right," he said, smiling merrily with twinkling glasses, "for I have got to get something else before the engagement is complete. You didn't let me finish. I was going to say that the Squire has agreed to my engagement to Marigold as soon as I find the treasure. Of course we are bound to find it, but I don't like the delay."

"What does Marigold say to it?" I asked.

"She is so afraid of her father that she is thankful for small mercies."

"At the least, I can congratulate you on working wonders in a very short time," I said.

"Thanks. I have been fairly successful. Roy gets more friendly with his father every day, and the old man himself is certainly turning over a new leaf. You will have to retract a lot of your prophecies yet, Seaton."

"I hope I shall," I answered.

It was that same day that—possibly spurred on by the obvious happiness of Morgan—I summoned up pluck to make a proposal of my own. It is impossible for me to keep my own feelings and actions out of this history of the Hopeton treasure,



because, as will be seen, this resolution of mine had a direct bearing upon the solution of the cryptogram.

It happened, then, that I had arranged to meet Betty Forbes that afternoon by the fox-cover, in order to make an excursion to the top of the hill on whose lower slope the house of the Tanishes was built. There was a cairn on this hill, and although we had visited several of the hill-tops without finding a vestige of a clue, Betty was still as keen as before. To me it mattered little where we went, provided we went together.

It was a lovely summer day, with hardly a breath of wind, and a deep blue sky broken only by a few small fleecy clouds.

I waited by the stile on the margin of the wood, and watched the dainty form of Betty climbing towards me between the broken dykes on the old Roman Road. She was dressed in some light creamy material covered with dainty small sprigs of flowers, and wore a wide straw hat, beneath which glimpses of her rich hair shone as she looked up towards the wood where I awaited her. She had the light springy step of the country girl used to rough roads and rougher hillsides. It was a joy to sit there idly on the stile and see her coming towards me.

"Have I kept you long?" she called as she drew near. "Never mind, you are not really a busy person. I am! I stopped at Newgate's farm to inspect the new baby—a most interesting production!"

"You don't look to be dressed for hill climbing," I remarked, with my admiring eyes upon her.

"Don't call these things hills," she said, pointing to the green and purple knolls all around us. "Over there, on Arran, it is different. Goatfell would finish a frock like this, and I should be barefoot before I was half-way to the top. But this is just a gentle stroll up a heather-clad slope."

The hill we had chosen for our investigation lay, as I have said, behind Hopeton, and from where we met we had to cross the shoulders of two lower knolls before we started the actual climb. At two hillside burns that lay across our track I offered my hand to Betty, but she scorned my assistance, and jumped from stone to stone with an ease and grace born of long custom.

It took us under an hour to reach our destination. We threw ourselves down upon the springy heather to rest after the climb. The cairn that we had come to see

was like all the others in the district—just a pile of loose stones gathered from the hillside. What we expected to discover merely by looking at it I do not know to this day. Perhaps some rude inscription on a stone may have been in our minds, but we were quite vague in our expectations.

“I am afraid we have drawn another blank,” said Betty. She had discarded her hat, and lay upon the slope with her hands behind her head, her back resting on a weather-worn boulder. “You are a broken reed, Bob. You don’t seem to be as full of brilliant ideas as you ought to be.”

“I have never professed to be one of the brainy ones,” I said laughingly. “You expect too much from me. It is you who are the treasure-finder, Betty. You are far more enthusiastic than I am.”

“Of course if you are *tired* of these expeditions you have only to say so!” Betty replied provokingly. “I have my own copy of the little pictures, and I can hobble about by myself somehow or other!”

“Betty, you are a cat!” I declared solemnly.

“Of course I am. Have you only just discovered it? All girls are cats, only some are more catty than others. But what par-

ticular trait in the feline race are you referring to at the moment?"

"The mouse trick," I answered. "You ought not to play with a poor chap. You know jolly well that it is not the Hopeton treasure that I run about all over the countryside after. It is another treasure, in my eyes thousands of times more valuable!"

"If you are going to be sentimental, Bob, I shall go home," said Betty lightly; but there was a new colour and a half-frightened expression growing upon her face, that told me she knew that we were getting down to essentials.

"I *am* going to be sentimental, and I shan't let you go home," I said firmly; but my heart was beating like a steam-hammer, and there was a buzzing in my head that spoke of strong excitement.

"Hark to the man-thing, with his masterful ways!" exclaimed Betty to the bare hill-side; but her long red lashes drooped over her honest brown eyes.

"You know what treasure I want, Betty?" I said, and I found that my throat was so dry and husky all of a sudden that my voice sounded quite unlike itself.

"How can I know until you tell me?"

said Betty in a low voice and without looking up.

I remember she was plucking the little purple flowers from a spray of heather as she spoke. It seemed to me that the warm summer air had become suddenly electrified. I felt a drumming in my ears and a vibration of the air upon my skin.

Betty's preoccupation with her spray of heather annoyed me. I wanted her full attention. I stretched out my hand and swallowed up both of hers—heather and all—in my grip.

"*You* are the only treasure for me, Betty," I said hoarsely. "I want *you*, and the little pictures can go hang for all I care."

"Don't speak about it, Bob, don't!" said Betty in a low tremulous voice. "I'm not ready to marry; I didn't expect you to speak so soon. I haven't looked life in the face yet. I'm just a girl—enjoying herself. . . . Can't we go on doing that?"

I shook my head.

"No!" I replied. "It is not enough! We are friends—and the best of friends; but I want a wife. I am no longer content to be a pal, and go treasure-seeking for the pleasure of seeing you and listening to your dear voice. I must have you



for my very own. Any one can be your friend—I am your lover.”

At last Betty raised her long lashes and looked me in the eyes, with a shy smile in which there seemed a hint of fear.

“I wish we could have stayed longer on the old terms, Bob. It was so jolly; and I don’t want to grow up,” she said.

“If you care for me, Betty, the new terms will be to the old like—like—champagne to ginger-ale.”

“I wonder!” she said doubtfully. Then, as though shaking off her fear and indecision with an effort, she sat up and drew her hands away from mine. “Bob,” she said, “I shan’t promise you now. I am very, very fond of you. You know that quite well. I’ll make a bargain with you. Come! Read me the little pictures, and I’ll marry you as soon as you like!”

I shook my head at that.

“No, no!” I cried. “Don’t stake our love upon a chance like that! The cipher may never be solved, and are we to drag on and on apart because of a mere puzzle that doesn’t even concern either of us?”

“I don’t say that, Bob,” replied Betty with a sweet sunny smile. “I don’t say I will never marry you until the pictures

are read; but that I will marry you as soon as you read them."

"But you love me, Betty?"

I placed my hand again over her two small ones, and looked steadily into her brown eyes; but the long lashes fell, as though she were afraid of what I might read there.

"Scotch people are shy of that word, Bob," she said hesitatingly. "I can't say it—but I do l—like you a lot."

"Then withdraw that silly condition about the little pictures, and promise to be my wife."

"I want time to get used to it all," she answered, shaking her head gently. "Read the little pictures, Bob. There is time enough. I feel so young to promise to marry any one."

"It isn't *any one*—it is *me* we are talking about. I don't believe the pictures will ever be solved, and I don't want to wait years for you, Betty. It is so unnecessary."

But Betty stuck to her point. I argued it all ways with her, but the cipher had come to be a kind of mild obsession, and I could not force it out of my track. I knew that Betty loved me, as surely as I knew my own feeling for her. One gets to

know. There can be few proposals made in which there is much doubt of the answer.

It was a most aggravating situation, yet there was nothing for me to do but submit. I had at least the consolation of knowing that it would all come right in the end. Curiously enough, I did not feel spurred on to solve the cipher as quickly as possible in order to obtain my reward. I had struggled so often with those baffling pictures already, that I felt that there was nothing more to be done—nothing but wait patiently until Betty would tire of the search and be my wife of her own free will.

So we lay there silent upon the pungent springy heather, with the hot July sun beating down upon us, each busy with thoughts of the other, and each, after the recent intimate talk, shy of meeting the other's eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM where we lay on the warm hillside we had a glorious panoramic view of the district, and of the Firth of Clyde with all its islands. I have already described how much I was struck by the beauty of the Clyde in an early part of my story, but it is necessary that I dwell for a moment upon the foreground of our landscape.

Immediately beneath us, and less than half a mile away as the crow flies, lay Hopeton—the Big Hoose, as the country people called it. Looking down, one could trace the whole course of the Hopeton Burn to the spot where it flowed into the Firth.

The ranges of low hills on either side of the glen were beneath us, for the hill upon whose slope Hopeton was built was the highest of the knolls in the neighbourhood. So, from where we sat, we looked down upon the summits of the other hills, each with its rough cairn of stones. On the

right side of the glen, as we faced the sea, the slopes were purple with blooming heather, but the range on the left was grazing land, and here and there one could see the moving white dots that were sheep.

As I lazily glanced over this panorama, I picked out Blackdykes and the wood where I had found Roy mourning over his injured wife. Subconsciously I counted the hills that lay between us and the wood. I called up in my mind that scene in the moonlit clearing, where Roy sat moaning at the base of the rough stone cairn. How clearly could I recall the sounds of that night—the clatter of the wood-pigeons in the trees overhead and the strange cries of Roy in his trouble! I had never returned to the spot.

Gradually an idea crystallised in my mind. I counted those hills again—this time with my senses fully alert. My heart beat faster as excitement grew upon me. I lay perfectly still and called before my eyes a facsimile of the little pictures—for I needed no paper to refresh my memory. . . .

A few minutes passed in silence. My mind was intent upon the little pictures, to the exclusion even of Betty.



At last I heaved a great sigh of relief and sat up.

"Tell me, Betty," I said, "in what direction does Blackdykes lie from here?"

"Over there, stupid. Don't you see the farm?" she answered, misunderstanding my question.

"Yes, yes! I see it all right," I said hastily. "But where does it lie by the compass?"

"Um! Let me see. . . . That is north, and that is west," ruminated Betty, waving her hand in the directions as she named them. "I should say Blackdykes lies about south-west."

"Right you are! I thought so," I cried excitedly. "Now tell me, how far is it from Hopeton to Blackdykes—*as the crow flies?*"

"Why do you want to know that?" inquired Betty lazily. She could still see no point in my questions, and would not hurry with her answers. "Anyhow, I can't tell, none of my family having ever been crows."

"Do be sensible, Betty. This is serious!"

At that she sat up and looked at me strangely.

"Whatever is the matter, Bob? Why, you are quite panting with excitement."

"Tell me—how far is it from Hopeton to Blackdykes—as *the crow flies*?"

"About two miles, I should think. But why——"

I did not give her time to finish her question. I picked myself up from the heather, and before Betty had realised my intention, had caught her by the hands, raised her from the ground, and, clasping her in my arms, covered her face with kisses.

She was so astonished that for a moment she made no resistance to my caresses. Then, recovering herself, she struggled free and started away from me with flushed face and startled eyes.

"Have you gone mad, Bob?" she exclaimed. "You had no right!——"

"I have the right, my darling, You are mine," I cried exultingly. I believe that in my excitement I executed a wild step-dance among the heather. Seeing, however, that Betty was really becoming frightened by my mad doings, I stopped to reassure her.

"It is all right, dear. I am not mad," I said more quietly. "But I have read the

little pictures—and I'm going to marry you as soon as all the arrangements can be made."

Betty looked at me sceptically.

"You are joking!" she said, "You can't possibly have done it so soon."

"But I have," I replied, "Come, let's sit down, and you shall be convinced."

I put my arm around her, and pulled her down upon the heather. I could feel the flurried beating of her heart beneath her breast. Betty, too, was beginning to experience the excitement of the chase.

"Now then, my dearest, here are the little pictures," I said exultingly, taking the copy from my pocket, "I can read them like print now that I have got the idea."

"Read them to me, then," Betty demanded. "Explain afterwards, but read them to me now."

"Very well," I agreed. "Here goes—

"Two miles south-west of Hopeton, on the left of the Hopeton Burn, there is a wood on the north-east slope of the fourth hill in the range, counting from the top of the glen. In this wood there is a clearing, and in the middle of the clearing a rough stone cairn. Dig down three feet under the

cairn, and you will find a chest containing the Hopeton treasure.' That is clear enough, is it not?"

"It is quite clear," Betty agreed. "But is it right? I don't see how you can read all that long story from the pictures."

"I admit that I have spun it out to the fullest, but all the essentials are there, and you may be quite certain it is right—it can't mean anything else. Look, what is the first picture?"

"The Tanish crest," replied Betty. "You said long ago that it was only there as Hamish's seal to the paper."

"I was wrong," I admitted. "It means much more than that. You know that the crest is carved above the porch of Hopeton? Well, this crest gives us the starting-point. It stands for Hopeton. The next bit is easy. You have a crow—or rather a very crude conventional diagram of a crow—a long straight line, the figure two in Roman numerals, and the letters S.W. That can only mean 'Two miles as the crow flies.'"

"Yes, yes," cried Betty excitedly. "Go on. It must be so!"

"Then you really will marry me soon?" I demanded.

"Don't tease, Bob, like a dear," she

answered coaxingly. "Follow the little pictures."

"Then we have the hills. There are four of them with the zigzag lines underneath. These lines mean *water*—not necessarily the sea as we thought—so why not the Hopeton Burn, with the hills above it?"

"True," agreed Betty. "But how will you account for the anchor, if you are going to do away with the sea?"

"We were wrong there, too," I replied. "It isn't an anchor. But we have not come to that yet. We are just at the four hills. This thing reads from left to right, in lines, like a book. So we follow along the four hills with the burn flowing below, and on the fourth hill, which is just two miles as the crow flies from Hopeton, we find a wood on the north-east slope. There is the wood."

I pointed to the peculiar markings above the slope of the hill.

"These, I suppose, are trees, then," said Betty. "But why are they flying in the air?"

"It is only a conventional way of showing them," I explained. "Old Hamish may have seen some Chinese prints in which this method is adopted, or he may have invented it himself to make his cipher more obscure."



"I should like to be able to compliment him on his success," Betty remarked. "Now we come to the square of stars. What do you make of them?"

"Trees again," I replied. "They are fir-trees shown in plan—a kind of bird's-eye view of them. They represent the trees surrounding the clearing in the wood. In the middle is the cairn—it is there, for I have seen it—and then we have the direction, 'Dig down three feet under the cairn and you will find a chest containing the Hopeton treasure.' It is a pick or mattock—not an anchor—you see!"

"Clever boy!" exclaimed Betty. "You must be right. It is all as plain as a pike-staff—once you know it. How you ever got on the right track I can't understand."

"It must have been the prize you promised me that stirred up my intellect," I replied. "Yet I was not conscious of it at the time. I was thinking of that night when I found Roy and Marie in the wood, and at the same time I was looking at the hills. The whole thing came upon me in a moment. Yet it must have been my prize that was behind it all. Betty, I am to have my reward?"

Betty laid her lovely head gently upon my shoulder.

"Yes, Bob," she whispered, and snuggled close with a sigh of content. . . .

It was some time later that we awoke once more to the realities of life. It was Betty who first returned to the practical side of things. For myself, I had forgotten the little pictures and the Tanishes with all their discords.

"Bob, Bob, this will never do," said Betty, sitting up and smoothing her hair where it had become ruffled in my embrace. "We are being horribly selfish. Think of these poor people anxiously waiting for you to read the little pictures to them!"

"Ignorance is bliss," I answered lazily. "They don't know that I have solved the thing, so they are no more anxious than usual. Don't be so practical, my dear."

"But it is getting towards evening, and it will be dark before the treasure is found."

"Never mind. Let's keep the secret to ourselves until morning, and then they will have a full day before them," I proposed.

I did not care a scrap about the treasure. All that I wanted on earth was beside me there on the hill-top. Is it to be wondered at that I preferred to stay where I was?

But Betty would not have it so. She was full of curiosity and anxiety about the trea-

sure, and nothing would satisfy her but that we should rush down the hill to Hopeton at once and organise the treasure-hunt.

"How are we to account to the Laird for the fact that you are acquainted with the cipher?" I asked. "He is not on the best of terms with you as it is, and he may make a fuss."

"He will be too excited over finding the treasure," Betty declared. "Tell him all about it before he sees me, and I'll wager he never even notices that I am in the party—for I won't be left behind. I must be in at the death!"

"Very well. We shall have to risk it," I agreed. "You can wait outside while I tell the tale indoors. I shall try to send Marigold out to you, and perhaps, as you say, the Laird will be too preoccupied to notice."

With that we started off down the slope of the hill, running hand-in-hand through the heather, risking broken ankles in our pure high spirits and joy in life.

If I have dwelt over-long upon this scene upon the hill-top, it must be borne in mind that it was the happiest moment that I had known in my life, and, moreover, that my new understanding with Betty was inextricably mingled with the reading of the little

pictures. The one could not be told without the other, and after all, what need to apologise for lingering over a pleasant passage in a tale wherein so much is gloomy and where tragedy looms so near ahead.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

It seemed almost as though fate had arranged the scene and the players in anticipation of my reading of the little pictures, for as we approached Hopeton we saw Roy's small two-seater standing outside, and in the dining-room, after leaving Betty in the garden, I found the whole family—Roy and his wife included—seated at the tea-table.

"I have solved the cipher!" I declared baldly as I entered.

"Dear, dear, dear! I knew you were the little winner," cried Morgan, and he jumped up from his seat to shake my hand warmly.

My disclosure was almost too much for Laird Tanish. He, too, started up from his chair, his face suffused with blood, and his eyes staring at me wildly.

"You've — solved — it!" he stammered, word by word. Then, as the idea grew more familiar to him, his scattered senses returned "Wonderful, Seaton, wonderful," he ex-



claimed. "But I always thought you would do it"—and rubbing his hands gleefully, he burst into a fit of his loud laughter.

They were all excited by my news. Mari-gold was silent, but I saw her glance at Jabez Morgan in a way that could not be mistaken, and she gave me a quick look of thanks that was equally easy to read. Her brother Roy was boyishly enthusiastic. Nothing would serve him but that we must find the treasure that very night.

"Is it near here, Doctor?" he demanded. "I shall never sleep until we know the value of it."

"That's the boy for me!" bellowed his father, clapping him on the shoulder vigorously. "He wants to feel the golden guineas trickling through his fingers! Ha, ha, ha!"

Roy's wife showed less interest than any one in my declaration. She had glanced up quickly at me when first I spoke, with a queer contemptuous look in her sidelong eyes, but she spoke no word, and I wondered if she was in truth annoyed that her prophecy of my failure had been proved untrue. Now, whilst the others talked, she remained calm and observant, watching the Laird and Roy with quick glances that missed nothing.

As soon as the excitement of my disclosure had calmed down, I produced the little pictures, and once again read the directions hidden within them, and explained the symbols one by one.

"Dear, dear! You're some sleuth, Seaton," exclaimed Morgan when I had finished my exposition. "Yet the thing is so simple once you know it, that I could kick myself for being such a mutt. Well, well, Squire, your dream is coming true at last—and ours too, Marigold!"

Marigold blushed and lowered her eyes, but I saw her press Morgan's hand as it lay near hers upon the table.

The meal that was in progress was completely forgotten. The Laird was walking up and down or wandering round the table, rubbing his hands and giving vent to sudden ejaculations of astonishment and pleasure. The others—with the exception of Marie, who still sat in her place, attentive, but silent and cold—were gathered around me scrutinising the little pictures.

"But we are wasting time!" exclaimed Roy suddenly, starting up from his inspection of the cipher. "We can study the ingenuity of this at our leisure. The great thing now is to find the treasure. Father,

what do you think? There is plenty of time before dark."

"Yes, yes," answered the Laird. "Let us have the climax to-night. Ha, ha, Seaton, you are a pleased man this day, eh? And you, Morgan, eh? All your plans coming to a head! Yes, yes, Roy, my lad. Fancy you and Marie living so close to all the family wealth and never guessing it. Ha, ha, ha! It's rich, that, rich."

"We'll want a couple of spades and a pick," said the practical Roy. "Come along, Morgan, let us find them."

Then Marie spoke for the first time.

"Hold, Roy!" she said, looking up curiously at her husband. "Is it not that this money is under our land?"

"If Dr Seaton is right in his reading of the cipher, it is," replied Roy. "But what has that got to do with it? We are all in league together to find the treasure. When it is found it will be time enough to think about the division of the spoil."

Marie dropped her eyes. I could have sworn that a shade of disappointment crossed her face. It was as if she had wished to cause discord, and had failed. Laird Tanish heartily seconded his son's words.

"Ay, ay, Roy," he said. "Time enough

when the gold is unearthed. Don't you worry about whom it belongs to, Marie, my lass."

Morgan and Roy went off to find the necessary tools. The rest of us were making towards the door to prepare for the excursion when I noticed that Roy's wife made no effort to join us.

"Are you not coming with us, Mrs Tanish?" I asked.

"But why?" she said with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "If it is that you find the money, you will bring it here. If there is nothing—I shall be saved the pain."

Laird Tanish looked at his daughter-in-law with an expression that I could not fathom. Then, going behind her chair, he placed his hand on her shoulder, bent over her, and murmured some words in her ear.

Marie shook her head slightly.

"I am fatigued. I shall await you here," she said.

For a moment the Laird looked as if he would pursue his usual course when crossed, and burst into a violent fit of rage. He controlled himself, however, with an obvious effort, and accepted Marie's refusal calmly.

"Very well, have it your own way," he

said. "But you're going to miss a most exciting hour."

"But yes! That is why it is that I stay," replied Marie. "I do not wish for your excitement—it might be too strong for me."

So we left her there at Hopeton, sitting at the tea-table with her cold face as inscrutable as marble, her fingers idly crumbling a fragment of bread.

I had forgotten—even if I had had the opportunity—to warn Marigold that Betty was waiting for us outside. The Laird saw her as soon as we came out. His face darkened, and again I feared a scene.

"And what might the doctor's daughter be wanting at Hopeton?" he demanded, looking at her with set face and lowered brows.

I felt it was up to me to take the brunt, if the outburst had to come.

"Miss Forbes is my promised wife," I said boldly. "What I know, she knows, and she is naturally interested in the sequel."

"So, Seaton! You've been treasure-hunting on your own, eh? Ha, ha! Let her come! Let her come! The more the merrier!"

At that moment Roy and Morgan appeared



with the necessary tools, and nothing further was said of Betty's presence.

I looked at my watch as we set out for Blackdykes. It was just after half-past five, but the daylight is long in Scotland in July, and I thought we should have plenty of time for all that was to be done. I little guessed what lay before us ere another day should dawn.

Roy and his father led the way. Morgan hung back to have a word with me.

"Congratulations, Seaton, my boy," he said, giving my arm a squeeze. "You are some sticker. Dear, dear, I had mighty near given up prospecting for gold in this section. If it hadn't been for you we'd never have made good. Marigold has handed it out that you've acquired your own little prize-packet simultaneous. Gee! You are a lucky chap."

"So are you with Marigold," I answered, when I had thanked him for his words. "It is a great day."

"Yes," he agreed. "I shall claim Marigold as soon as the first dollar is turned up. So don't grudge your sweat when the digging begins, Seaton!"

It took us fully three-quarters of an hour to get to the wood upon the hillside, for

though it was but two miles as the crow flies, it was considerably more by the paths across the country.

We walked in couples. The Laird had called Morgan to him, and they took the lead. Roy and his sister followed, while Betty and I—who were, after all, only spectators—brought up the rear. We had fallen some little way behind the others by the time they reached the border of the wood, for we were intent upon our own talk, which was of an intimate and personal nature.

As the others disappeared amongst the fir-trees we hurried forward, anxious to be present when the cairn was reached. Before we got to the clearing, however, we realised that something was amiss.

The voice of Laird Tanish was raised in boisterous laughter—laughter that sounded even to us who could not yet see his face—so unnatural and vicious that Betty instinctively caught my arm and clung to it.

We hurried into the clearing.

In the middle of it stood the Laird, leaning upon the handle of a spade, his raucous laughter still ringing among the trees. The others stood silent, looking, with dismay written plain upon their faces, at the ground

before them. As my eyes followed theirs, and I realised at what they gazed, my heart gave a jump within me, and then seemed to stop at the shock of my disappointment.

There was no cairn in the clearing!

All around amongst the grass lay the stones of which it had been constructed. The Laird, with his evil grin, stood upon the edge of a roughly dug hole, and around him lay the loose black mould that had been excavated.

Some one had been before us!

I recalled the night when I had received that crashing blow upon my crown from a spade in the hands of Laird Tanish. I had but to glance at the evil expression of triumph and hate that gave to his face the look of a devil, in order to know who that *some one* had been. Nor was I the only one who guessed the truth, for a moment after Betty and I entered the glade Morgan, who seemed the most collected of the party, spoke in his usual quiet manner.

"Dear, dear, dear, Squire! So you've jumped the claim and cleared the dust! Well, well! You might have saved us the tramp by a little chin-wagging before we set out."

"And lost the pleasure of seeing your

mean little Yankee face drop!" bellowed the Laird, his laughter gone, and a look of concentrated cold hate changing his features almost beyond recognition. "Curse you—curse you all! I've lived for this. If that would-be clever ass, Seaton, had not worried the thing out, I'd have found some means of getting you here, to enjoy the look of disappointment on your greedy faces. I got the best of you all. You, Morgan, that thought you held all the trumps, and refused my just demand. You, Roy, thief and black-guard as you are, who meanly stole my promised wife when I could not look after my own. Ha, ha, ha! You, at least, will squirm before I've done with you. My very daughter, Marigold, intriguing behind my back with a paid servant, making clandestine appointments with the very man I most hate. Oh, you're all of you in it—all of you, and every one of you has got to suffer for the part he has played,"

It was painful to listen to him, and even more so to watch his face. As he spoke of us in turn, each fresh phrase brought a deeper shade of hatred over his face, and if he had appeared a devil before he spoke, he was the very chief of the fiends ere he had finished.

"Now that I have you here," he continued, turning his eyes, bloodshot with rage, on each of us in turn, "Sit you down and listen to what I have to tell you. You shall hear what's come of the treasure and how you've each and all been beaten on the post. Sit you down."

None of us thought to disobey. For the moment we were under the spell of the evil face and raucous voice. Without a word we seated ourselves upon the grass, our eyes fixed upon the central figure, as he stood over the empty treasure-hole leaning on the spade, and eyeing us like some nightmare schoolmaster.



## CHAPTER XXV.

"It is you, Roy, that suffers most by my story," began the Laird, in a colder but more biting voice. "And—curse you for ever!—it is no more than your deserts. You dared to come between me and what I had set my mind on, and from the moment I heard of your crime I swore that you should pay the price. Did you think for one moment that I was satisfied with one blow at your face? Ha, ha, ha! You have little of the Tanish blood in your veins if you got no deeper into me than that.

"Maybe you'd like to know who all but killed . . . your wife"—the words seemed to stick in his throat—"on this very spot I stand on? It was me! And if I had killed her outright it would have been no murder, but a just vengeance on her treachery to me. But she repented of it,

Roy. She gave me her confidence in the end—more than she ever gave you, though you are her husband.

“Listen. When I returned from America, and found how I’d been cheated in my absence, I never once faltered in my determination to be revenged. I hung about Blackdykes at night to see how things were going with the happy pair. Ha, ha! Happy pair, indeed! I soon found that there was little love on Marie’s side of the bargain. Three nights I watched her slip out alone to this very spot on which I stand. I saw her pick a few stones from the cairn each time, drop them amongst the trees, and then return to the farm. On the third night I guessed her secret, and in my just anger at her treachery”—it was strange how he insisted throughout on the “justice” of his own actions and the “treachery” of every one else—“I discharged my gun at her before I saw that there was a better and more subtle vengeance to be had. Fortunately I only wounded her slightly. Ay, Seaton, you never guessed that I was close by when you rushed forward to render first aid. You tried to deceive me from the first. You’ve been in league with my enemies from the day you came to Hopeton,

but all along I've watched you and taken your measure.

"I thought my shot was a blunder; but it turned out a good move in the end, for it brought Marie over to my side. I had to wait weeks before I saw her again; but when she came again to the wood—as she did at last—I let a few nights pass, and then I stepped boldly forward and had it out with her. Oh, but she is a cunning one is Marie! She deceived me in her translation of the Flemish letter, for our ancestor's servant knew where the treasure was hidden, and his letter contained directions for finding it. Marie kept this information to herself, and when I was safely out of the country she married you, Roy. But not for love! No, no, don't you believe it! She married you in order to get close to the spot where the treasure was hidden. She never told you her secret—not her. If she had ever loved you she would have shared it with you; but she slipped out alone, night after night, to the wood, and laid the cairn flat.

"I watched her each night, until one by one she had lifted the heavy stones and spread them round the clearing. I was not fool enough to come out of hiding until

she had finished the heavy work. Ha, ha, Seaton! you may pride yourself on your chess; but when it comes to real life, I can match my cunning against yours—ay, and beat the lot of you.”

It was typical of the whole bearing and actions of the man, this mean dealing with his fellow-conspirator. It made one shiver to hear him exult in his own meanness. I dared not look at the others, but sat half-fascinated with horror to hear a fellow-being gloat over what most men would give a fortune to hide.

“When I disclosed myself at last, Marie all but fainted with fear. I soon had the whole story out of her—how she used you, Roy, as a cloak to cover her theft of the treasure; how she got her directions from the letter of Hamish’s servant, and faked up a false translation; how, little by little, she meant to get the treasure to a safe place, and then leave you for ever. Ha, ha, ha! A nice wife you sold your birth-right to steal, and a pleasant recollection you’ll have of your married life!”

At last I looked at Roy. I felt I must see how he was behaving under his ordeal. He sat with a dazed look upon his face, as though he only half comprehended what was

being said. I saw that Marigold had come close to him and held his hand in hers, but I could swear he did not know it.

“When she saw that I had her in my power,” continued the Laird pitilessly, “she soon agreed to share the treasure with me. It was the best she could do for herself. But I never meant she should have her share. Not me! And not a halfpenny of it will she ever lay hands on!

“It will gratify you all—self-seeking pack that you are—to hear that we found the treasure at this very spot I stand on. Hamish was no liar or boaster. The chest was packed to the brim with gold—guineas from England, louis from France, doubloons from Spain, dobras from Portugal; a mixed lot, but all good yellow gold that had been scraped together with infinite trouble, and all worth far more than its face value to-day. All mine, every farthing of it, and I defy the cleverest of you to dock me of a stiver.

“Ay, and better than the gold itself is to stand here and see your greedy faces blank with disappointment. What, Morgan! You with your cheap Yankee cunning to stand up against the like of me! You to call yourself a Tanish! Why, man, you



are a living insult to the race. Generations of degenerate Yankee blood has diluted the Tanish strain until it produces a miserable double-dealing rat that would be a disgrace to the meanest family in the land. And you thought you could beat *me*! Did you think I didn't know you had sneaked into Kilbrennan, suborned my boy's tutor, and made underhand love to my daughter?

"Ay, Seaton, you thought you had managed to get Duncan under your thumb nicely! It never struck you that I had but to ask him and he would tell anything he knew. You didn't think it worth while to hide from him your visits to Forbes or your meetings with Morgan, but there's little you did that I hadn't first-hand news of. And I played the lot of you up fine—I that was the doddering old fool you thought you could all turn round your fingers.

"You, Morgan, can go back to the States and paint your pictures, and thank God you go with a whole neck, for heaven knows it has been a trial to me to keep from twisting it. You would marry my daughter, would you? Now you know the meaning of my promise. You should have her when you found the treasure. Well, the

treasure was found before ever the promise was made.

“As for you, Marigold, you will get back to Hopeton and stay there a shrivelled old maid until the day you drop dead with a sigh of relief from your misery. You have gone against me for months. You have plotted against me with this contemptible Seaton, who would crow over me because he can play chess better than I can—and not so very much better after all!”

It was curious how my mastery over him at chess had rankled in his diseased mind. It was for that alone, I believe, that he hated me, although no doubt he would have found some other grievance against me had this one been non-existent.

“You may think even now, some of you, that you can get the better of me,” he went on. “Roy there might claim the treasure because it was found on his land. Let him! Even if he won, it would not give him back his wife’s love—for he never had it. Morgan may put in a claim on the strength of Hamish’s will—I tell you the gold is treasure-trove, and if any one of you speaks the law will claim the lot. But could the law find it? Ha, ha! It’s safely hidden, and none but Marie and me know where to look.

There's no little pictures to follow for it now, and soon it will be where I alone can find it. Marie must pay for her treachery.

"You've heard what I have to say. You, Marigold, get back to Hopeton and reconcile yourself as best you can to the punishment you deserve." It did not even occur to him that his daughter might disobey his commands. "Roy, never let the sight of your accursed face cross my eyes again. I'll send your wife back to you if you want her—and if she'll go, which I very much doubt. She has squeezed you of all she wanted, and it is not likely that she will return.

"As for you, Morgan, you Yankee jackanapes, that fancied he could marry among the Tanishes, you will find your bags flung on the road outside the gates of Hopeton. What becomes of you matters nothing to me. You are well repaid for your treatment of me in the States. You can take your friend and catspaw Seaton with you when you go. He'll find a month's salary thrown out with his baggage, but like yourself he shall not darken my door again. If that doddering old quack Forbes likes to take him in and marry him to his long-tongued red-headed girl, so much the better for my vengeance

on the whole pack of you, for she'll harry the life out of him with her infernal clatter."

The small-minded rancour that filled him bubbled out at its lowest in this attack on poor Betty. But we all had to have our share, so Betty must suffer with the rest.

The Laird paused in his tirade and looked us over with his bloodshot eyes, glowering under his heavy grey eyebrows.

"I daresay this is the happiest day of my life," he said meditatively, his voice exhausted with his long effort of vituperation. "To have you all here under my thumb, cowed by the exposure of your own tricks and double-dealings, to see your greed for my gold disappointed by my own efforts, to have the man who stole my promised wife beaten and disillusioned—it's meat and drink to me, meat and drink."

His voice tailed off towards the end. The mad fury which he had held dammed throughout the past weeks had carried him along thus far by the force of its own torrent. As he stood still leaning upon the spade, he looked an older man than ever I had seen him—a worn done man to be pitied rather than disliked.

When he ceased to speak a dead silence

reigned in the clearing. No one moved, no one spoke. Each awaited some word or action on the part of the other. I glanced around me and saw that Marigold was quietly weeping, with her head resting on her brother's shoulder. Roy's face told me nothing. It was cold and blank, like the face of the dead. Jabez Morgan, with hands clasped on his updrawn knees, looked at the Laird through his deceptive spectacles. It was hopeless to guess at his thoughts.

Early in this painful scene Betty had slipped her arm quietly through mine and drawn closer to me. Her head was bowed so that I could not see her face, but I could feel the trembling of the arm that rested in mine.

After all, it was the Laird himself who brought the scene to an end. With one last malignant look round those whom, in his distorted mind, he considered his victims, he straightened himself and cast aside the spade upon which he had leant throughout.

"Come, Marigold," he exclaimed harshly, "we are going back to Hopeton!"

Marigold looked up with a quick frightened glance, first at her father—then at Jabez Morgan.

"No, no, you must not go there. You



are mine, Marigold," cried the latter, starting to his feet.

She shook her head sadly but firmly.

"He needs me most," she murmured in a faint voice which hardly reached me.

Again Morgan protested.

"Miss Forbes will take you in until I can claim you as my wife," he pleaded. "You cannot go back there."

"I must," replied Marigold more firmly. "He needs me most."

"Ha, ha, ha!" broke in the Laird's harsh laughter. "You see how little power you have over a Tanish, Morgan. Come along, Marigold."

As he started across the clearing, his daughter rose with woeful face to follow him. Betty ran to her side and seized her arm.

"Come home with me, dear," she begged. "Even if it is only for to-night."

But Marigold gently drew her arm away.

"It is no use, Betty, dear. I am wanted at Hopeton. . . . There is little Duncan. I cannot leave him alone." She spoke in a low voice, but so firmly that Betty realised how futile it was to attempt to move her.

The delay irritated the Laird.

"Come on," he shouted. "I'll have no more parleying between my daughter and this crowd of sycophants. Get you home, girl, and thank God that your punishment for being a traitor to your own father is no worse. As for you," he turned and grinned malignantly at those of us who remained—"as for you, may I never see one of your accursed faces again."

With that, almost driving his unfortunate daughter before him, he disappeared into the wood.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT I have now to tell I did not see with my own eyes, but have pieced together from what I heard long afterwards. . . .

It was a very painful time for Marigold—that walk back to Hopeton. At first her father raved and stormed at her for what he was pleased to call her intrigue with Morgan, but gradually the reaction set in after his violent fit of passion, and he became so weak and tired that he was compelled to accept the support of his daughter's arm.

It took them quite an hour to reach the house, so that it must have been eight o'clock or a little later when they arrived.

At the thought of seeing Marie, and recounting to her the tale of his vengeance on his enemies, the Laird brisked up. He strode into the dining-room, calling loudly for his daughter-in-law. The room was empty. From room to room he strayed

without coming upon her for whom he sought.

Returning to the hall, he shouted for Mrs Cunningham, the housekeeper. The old lady hurried from her room, with the look of anxiety that was always on her face when her master called for her.

"Where is my son's wife?" demanded the Laird.

"She's gane hame, Laird. She's been awa' this twa 'oor an' mair."

"Gone home! But she was to await me here!"

"She didna, then," said the old woman. "Ye hadna lang been awa' afore she went oot an' staired the wee caur, an' she was awa' doon the drive in a meenit withoot a word tae a sowl."

"Curse her! Has she gone back to him then, after all her promises!" exclaimed Laird Tanish, striding up and down the hall, his hands clasped behind his back and his head bent.

Marigold watched him from the doorway of the dining-room, fearful of what his next action might be. Suddenly he stopped short as though struck by an idea, gave a roar of mingled rage and dismay, and rushed from the house.

Marigold at once jumped to the conclusion that in this new access of anger he was going to Blackdykes to make more trouble between Marie and Roy. She hastily flung a dark cloak over her light summer frock, and hurried out after him. The sun had now set, and dusk was already beginning to gather. She could see her father far down the drive, going at a pace of which one would not have believed him capable after his recent exhaustion.

He turned down the main road until he came to the path leading to the fox-cover—the same spot to which I had followed him upon the night when he felled me with the spade—but instead of going straight up the path, he turned sharply to the right, parallel with the main road, but on the other side of the hedge.

Seeing the direction in which he was going, Marigold kept to the road, thus keeping the hedge as a screen between her father and herself. She could hear the sound of his footsteps and catch occasional glimpses of him through the hedge, and by keeping well behind there was little fear of her being observed.

After keeping in touch in this fashion for about a hundred yards, the sound of a rush-



ing burn which flowed down the hillside and passed through a culvert beneath the road drowned her father's footsteps, and she was compelled to trust to chance in her pursuit. She assumed that her father must cross the burn and appear upon the rising ground beyond, but as she did not see him she advanced cautiously to the culvert and peered over the parapet. The Laird was not to be seen.

Even as she was wondering what could have become of him, a deep muffled roar burst out beneath her very feet. Marigold was so startled that she ran back from the culvert and stood upon the solid road beyond. As she listened again, she recognised her father's voice, muffled yet magnified. He was beneath the roadway, in the course of the burn, and from the tone of his voice Marigold judged that once again his rage had mastered him.

Not knowing but that he might be engaged in a conflict with some unknown person, Marigold struggled through a gap in the hedge and rushed down the steep bank to the burn. She saw her father—inside the arch of the culvert—groping under the water, his sleeves submersed above the elbow, and as he groped he cursed,

and bellowed almost like an animal in pain.

"Gone, gone! Curse her! Not a bag, not a solitary bag has she missed."

"Father, father!" faltered Marigold, "what is it? What is the matter?"

"That accursed woman!" answered the Laird, too preoccupied to be surprised at his daughter's presence. "How could she know it was here! I never gave her a hint. Night after night I removed as much as I could carry, and hid the bags here, beneath the culvert. It was a grand scheme, Marigold, for one dark night I could bring the car just overhead, and be off with the whole treasure long before she guessed it. But she must have followed me, curse her, and found the hiding-place. Who would have believed that a pale-faced chit like her would have had such devilish cunning? But I'll have it back—ay, if I have to tear the house down to get at her!"

He scrambled out from underneath the culvert, and, with Marigold following close in his track, climbed up the bank and out upon the road. There he seemed for a moment to hesitate.

"If she thinks to share with Roy, I'll be the death of them both," he muttered. "But

I doubt it, I doubt it! She's not the woman to share what she can keep to herself."

He stood in the roadway thinking and muttering to himself—then, coming suddenly to a decision, he started off at a sharp pace back to Hopeton.

Marigold, keeping close beside him, heard him call for the car to be brought round, and saw him wrap himself up warmly as if for a long run. She hastened to get her own motor-coat, for she did not mean that he should leave her sight.

When the car came to the door, Laird Tanish sent back the driver and himself took the wheel. Marigold made to step in after him, but he pushed her back roughly and slammed the door.

"No, no!" he said, "you stay behind. For all I know you may just want to spy on me—and, whether or no, there may be that done this night that it were better you did not see."

The engine was running. In a moment the car was off down the drive, leaving Marigold standing upon the steps of Hopeton.

When Laird Tanish and Marigold left the clearing, those of us who were left behind stood silently watching them until they

were hidden from sight amongst the undergrowth.

Morgan was the first to break the spell that had been over us for so long.

“Dear, dear, dear!” he exclaimed. “What a man! A thousand years ago he would have been credible, but to-day! Seaton, I’m real sorry I’ve let you in for this, but how could I tell? I ask you—would any reasonable being have believed that such——”

Seeing the look on my face he paused and let his eyes follow mine.

It was Roy. It was sacrilege to talk in the presence of agony such as his. It seemed as if his brain had been numbed by the disclosure of his wife’s deceit, and that now it had begun to resume its functions. All that he had heard—rendered doubly bitter by his father’s rancour and exultation—swept over him in a flood, breaking down the barriers of self-control, leaving him a trembling and broken man, shaken by dry sobs that it was a misery to hear.

She had never loved him! Therein lay the bitterness of it all. The deceit, the treachery, would have mattered not at all, had only love for him been in her heart. But the cruel hard words of his father had driven that illusion away for ever. . . .

We could not stand and gape at grief like his. I took Betty's cold hand in mine and led her to the farthest corner of the clearing, Morgan following behind. There we spoke together, low-voiced, of what was to be done.

"Can we do nothing to help him?" said Betty brokenly, her dear warm heart aching at the sorrow of it.

"Nothing," I murmured in reply. "Let him have a little time to recover his self-control before we speak to him."

We waited silently, for there was nothing to be said. It began to grow dark and gloomy there in the wood, where night fell faster than in the open country. We waited with our backs to Roy, that we might not spy upon his weakness, and by-and-by we heard him coming to us. We turned to meet him. Morgan placed his hand upon the stricken man's shoulder in friendly fashion.

"What is to be done now, Roy?" he asked very quietly.

"I must see her . . . at least once more." He spoke slowly and quietly, as though with an effort.

"Not to-night, Roy, for God's sake," said Morgan beseechingly. "Enough has been



said for one day. Let it lie over. You'll see things clearer to-morrow."

Roy passed his hand across his brow in a dazed fashion, and shook his head.

"I must see her," he repeated.

"Come, let us take you home to Blackdykes," said Morgan, taking his arm as he might that of a child.

"Home!" Roy threw back his head and laughed harshly at the darkening blue sky. It was a laugh that was not good to hear.

Yet he permitted himself to be led along the narrow path and out of the wood. Betty and I followed behind. I was in somewhat of a quandary. A feeling of delicacy impelled me to turn and go back towards Kilbrennan, but, on the other hand, I had much to talk of with Morgan, and did not wish to lose sight of him. So Betty and I continued to follow, expecting that when we reached the farm Morgan would leave Roy and return with us.

The path from the wood brought us into the carriage-drive leading to the farmhouse, about a hundred yards away from the house itself. I heard the sound of a motor-engine as we approached, and on rounding a bend in the road saw Roy's little two-seater

standing in front of the house. Almost at the same moment Marie came out of the doorway carrying a heavy bag, which she placed in the car.

Roy must have seen her at the same moment, for he stopped dead in the roadway and stared ahead. The rest of us waited to see what he would do.

Marie seated herself in the car, slipped in the clutch, and started down the drive towards us. It was fated that these two should meet.

She saw us as she drew near, and I fancied I could read in her face the determination to go straight on. But it was not to be. Before she reached him Roy stepped right in front of the car, and, unless she had been willing to run him down, she was compelled to put the brakes on. The car came to a stop within a few feet of him. Marie sat at the steering-wheel with pale expressionless face, her eyes fixed upon her husband.

Roy looked at her in silence. For a moment that seemed hours no word was spoken.

"Why is it that you stop me?" demanded Marie at last, with cold and dispassionate voice.

Roy struggled for words.

"I want . . . to know——" he said, and stopped as though incapable of articulation.

"Assuredly you know enough. Has not the old man, your father, told you all that it needs for you to know?"

He shook his head.

"No, no!" he cried. "Tell me the truth. He may have lied. He wanted to hurt me . . . to cut me to the heart . . . he would tell any lie to wound me. Tell me that he lied, Marie, and that you love me still."

He held his arms out towards her in this forlorn hope, but there was no response in that cold pale face, no love in the hard black eyes that looked contemptuously upon his weakness.

"If he, your father, has told you that I have no love for you, then he has spoke true." Marie leant forward over the wheel, and though she spoke coldly and cuttingly, she showed more animation than I had seen in her. As she went on, the words came faster and more incisive. "If he told you that I have never loved you, he has still spoke true. If he told you that your dull Scottish nature is hateful to me, and that I would not have lived by you for one day had I not desired to steal the gold of your ancestor, he still spoke true. I hate you all,

you stupid people of Scotland, but most of all do I hate you, Roy Tanish.

“Stand aside!”

The car started, and gathered speed. Roy would assuredly have been knocked down and run over had not Morgan clutched him by the arm and dragged him out of the way.

As she passed us, Marie turned and waved a gloved hand, daintily, coolly, with a faint derisive smile upon her white hard face.

“Marie! Marie! Come back!” shouted Roy wildly, as he suddenly realised that she was going out of his life for ever.

The car sped on down the drive.

“Stop! Stop!” With outstretched arms the stricken man rushed madly after, shouting as he ran. The car gathered speed as it went, and rapidly increased its distance—but still he ran, hopelessly pursuing what could never be his.

“Stop him, Bob,” exclaimed Betty, to whom this scene was heartrending.

Morgan and I rushed after him. On the main road we found him staring wildly after the car, which was already a mere speck in the distance. Even as we looked it swung round and disappeared into the main road to Glasgow.

We were startled from our absorption by a loud "honk, honk," and the rush of a heavy car behind us. We started quickly to the roadside, dragging Roy with us.

Then, turning, we saw Laird Tanish, hatless and with eyes bloodshot and bulging, drawing up before us.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

IF we had not already guessed the reason of Marie's flight, the sight of the Laird's face, even without his words, would have given us the clue. The look of triumph had gone, and rage and dismay had taken its place.

"It's gone, all gone!" he shouted at us, forgetting in his obsession that we were the very people whom he had cursed and derided such a short time before. "Where is she? I'll have it back if I follow her to hell! If you are hiding her, Roy, I'll pull the house down stone by stone to find her."

"She is beyond your reach," said Roy quietly, looking his father steadily in the face. "You will never see her nor your accursed treasure again."

It is almost incredible that after his contemptuous treatment of me in the wood, the Laird should now turn to me for help. Yet so it was. So wrapt up was he in

his own selfish desire that no hint of shame or confusion interfered with his actions.

"Seaton," he cried, turning to me, "you must know where she has gone, or at least if she has been here. Come along, man, tell me quickly. You shall not be the loser by it in the end."

By this time I hated the mere thought of the Laird and his treasure. To me, the tragedy of Roy's broken life was the only thing that mattered. It was for him alone to decide what his father should be told. So I made no answer to his demand except to shake my head slightly.

"Curse you!" he cried. "You are all in league against me to let her escape. But she shall not escape."

His face cleared and his eyes lit up as an idea crossed his mind.

"What were you all looking up the road for, then? Ah! I see through it. She has taken the Glasgow road! And she's not long gone either. I'll have her yet, in spite of you all."

"No!" cried Roy wildly. "You must not follow."

But his words gave the Laird the confirmation he required.

"Stand back," he shouted, and made to start the car.

Roy jumped upon the foot-board and reached over, but he was too late. The clutch was in, and the heavy car began to move.

"Let go, you fool," shouted the Laird, for Roy had a grip upon the steering-wheel that prevented his free use of it.

"Never," replied Roy. "Stop the car, and let her go."

By now the car was moving forward with increasing speed. Roy stood on the foot-board, leaning over the door, and clutching at the wheel. His father raised his disengaged hand and struck him repeatedly, full in the face.

"For God's sake, Seaton, do something," shouted Morgan at my ear.

There was no time to think. The car was already moving rapidly away from us, but I could not let these two unnatural enemies leave us in the midst of a struggle. I rushed down the road and took a flying leap at the collapsed hood which projected in the rear. I succeeded in pulling myself up and over, and tumbled pell-mell into the tonneau. I was just in time. The car was now putting on speed rapidly.

"Roy, Roy," I shouted, gathering myself up and leaning over towards the struggling men. "You will wreck the car. Let go, for God's sake!"

My voice seemed to bring him to his senses. He looked up at me, his face bleeding from his father's blows, and pale with unnatural excitement.

"He must not go alone," he exclaimed desperately.

"Get in then," I cried, "and we'll both go with him."

As soon as Roy let go his hold on the steering-wheel, the Laird paid no further attention to him, but devoted himself to the management of the car. Roy clambered into the tonneau beside me, but he was not content with that. He must be in front, close to the driver. He stepped out on the foot-board on the opposite side and made his way forward. A moment later he had seated himself by his father's side.

It was the strangest situation. The two men—father and son—their interests diametrically opposed, sat side by side in the gathering night, silent and determined, rushing at top-speed towards an unknown goal. Behind them, myself—a mere spectator, free from the passions that blinded them to the

dangers of their course, with heart in mouth as we swung round the narrow bends, or rushed the almost precipitous gradients of the narrow road. We were running without lamps, and I hardly dared to look ahead.

It was obvious that if we had chosen the right road we must overtake the fugitive before many miles had gone by. The little two-seater was not good for more than about thirty, while the Laird must have been getting the best part of sixty out of his big Rolls-Royce. I felt a vast relief when the moon rose round and clear, and threw some light upon our wild journeying. Yet though the moonlight helped in the main, it made the darkness blacker as we rushed into some shadowed hollow amongst the hills, or ran under the gloom of a wooded stretch of road—and never a word was uttered by either of the passionate men upon whose blank silhouetted backs I gazed with a strange presentiment of disaster.

A sudden shout of exultation from the Laird brought me excitedly to my feet. He had sighted the quarry!

We were upon the crest of a long hill. Across the valley ahead we could see the white road climbing the opposing slope,



and faintly outlined in the moonlight—the little two-seater, plodding its way upward.

Laird Tanish vented a bellow of exultant laughter.

“I’ve got her! I’ve got her!” he shouted.

But Roy sat silent and motionless. I could not see his face, and vainly sought some clue to his feelings in the humped lines of his back.

We rushed down that hill and across the valley at break-neck speed. Luck must have been on our side, for stretches of the road were in the deepest shadow, yet Laird Tanish never for a moment slackened his pace.

When he reached the upward slope, he cursed furiously at the reduced speed, muttering to himself like the madman I sometimes thought he must be. When we reached the summit, another savage yell of triumph told me that we had gained upon the quarry. Yes, there was the two-seater, barely half a mile ahead. One could just see it as it crossed the lighter patches of the road.

Then Roy, who had come to a decision, spoke.

“You will take your accursed treasure,

and let her go," he said—not questioningly, but definitely as an order.

"I promise nothing. She is a robber, a thief! I'll have no mercy on her," shouted his father savagely.

"She is my wife. I claim her," replied Roy. He spoke calmly, his voice completely under control, but as a man whose determination was unalterable.

"Be damned to all your claims," retorted the Laird, his eyes intent on the car upon which we were rapidly gaining.

But that would not do for Roy. He leant across and clutched at the steering-wheel.

"Promise that you will take your treasure and let her go—or I will dash the car into the roadside," he cried, and I could see enough of his face to know that he meant every word of his threat.

For me, seated helpless in the tonneau, it was no pleasant position. I was at the mercy of the passions of two men to whom, for all practical purposes, I did not exist. A cry for mercy would not be heard, or if heard would not be listened to. They were both far beyond all considerations of reason.

"Have it your own way," replied the Laird. "I'll let her go—but much good will it do you."

Roy released his hold, and sat back in his place. To his father, nothing mattered but the money. He was prepared to agree to anything did he but get back his vanished treasure.

The car roared on its perilous way. At times the two-seater was plain ahead, again it had disappeared in the black shadows or vanished round some bend in the road—only to reappear closer to us than before, and each time, as he saw how we had gained, Laird Tanish shouted aloud in his delight.

By this time Marie had realised that she was pursued. More than once I saw her glance quickly backward over her shoulder—for we were now near enough to distinguish her clearly. Another thing showed that she had observed us—we did not gain quite so quickly on her. Realising that we were in chase, she had let out her little car to its utmost, in a desperate effort to escape. It was hopeless, of course, for at the best she could not do much more than a mile to our two, yet it made Laird Tanish curse viciously when he ceased to gain so quickly.

Gradually we crept up, until in the bright moonlight every detail of the car ahead

stood out as clear as in the day. Soon we were separated by a bare hundred yards—fifty yards—twenty yards!

“Stop, damn you, stop!” roared the Laird.

Whether or not his voice carried amid the roar of the motors I do not know, but Marie kept straight on. Again and again he shouted to her, but without effect. We drew nearer and nearer—fifteen yards—ten yards—but still she swept on, oblivious to the shouts and curses that were hurled at her.

I stood up, clinging to the front of the tonneau, staring ahead almost terror-struck by the speed and the excitement of the chase. A deadweight of presentiment hung over me—a presentiment of disaster and death that paralysed me beyond articulation.

We were within five yards of the rear of the two-seater before the full realisation of the Laird’s madness swept over me—and almost at the same moment Marie, too, guessed his damnable intent.

She turned and looked back over her shoulder. The full light of the moon played on her dead-white face and picked out every contour of it. We were so close that she

could read the Laird's purpose in his face. As its full import came home to her, an awful change came over her pallid features. Fear—the crude bald fear of death—changed her almost beyond recognition. With one wild shriek of terror she turned her face from us. It was the last time I was to look upon it.

Roy, too, had guessed his father's intention.

“My God!” he cried, and sprang to his feet.

For there was no attempt made by the Laird to draw alongside or pass the pursued car. In his mad rage he had forgotten even his own aim. At the risk of losing the treasure he sought—of wrecking his own car—of throwing away his life, to say nothing of Roy's or mine—he was deliberately steering into the two-seater, hatred and revenge being the only emotions left to him.

We were on a downward slope. The scene, with the white moonlight playing on it, is as clear to me as though I stood there now. A little way ahead, at the bottom of the hill, was a bridge over a trickling burn, and there, too, the road curved off to the left.

“My God!” cried Roy, as he sprang to



his feet. "Father, father—pull out while there is time."

A wild laugh from the Laird was his only answer.

Roy sprang at the steering-wheel. The Laird, anticipating his action, rose and faced him, with one hand still on the wheel.

There was a blow, a struggle that seemed to me to last hours, but which must have been over in a moment, and I caught one swift glimpse of the two-seater on my left as we swept past it.

The same moment the parapet of the bridge loomed big ahead. I saw two black struggling figures towering above me, locked in each other's arms—there was a crash as if the world had come to an end . . . and that is the last I remember.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“HE’S no deid, lass, but I doot . . .”

I opened my eyes to a glimpse of gorgeous colour. I seemed to see the face of Betty, pale and tear-stained, bending over me, and sunlight playing on her chestnut hair. It was only a glimpse, and then a great pain swept over me, swallowed me up, and carried me down, down to oblivion. . . .

When I again recovered consciousness I did not know whether moments or days had passed. I did not care. So weak was I that I lay—aware of my existence indeed—but powerless to raise my eyelids to examine my surroundings. I could hear faint movements around me, and once or twice a whispered word. How long I might have remained in this state I cannot tell, but I was aroused from it by a new sensation, so thrilling that it would almost have brought me back from the grave.

As I lay with closed eyes, conscious, but

no more, I became aware of a faint agreeable sensation upon my forehead, and a warmth of air upon my face. Even as I speculated weakly on the source of these sensations, something soft and warm touched my lips, and lay closer and still more closely against them. The gentle pressure increased, and my lips pursed half-consciously to meet it. My heart beat more strongly, my breath came faster, and I opened my eyes slowly, almost fearfully, lest I should break the spell that was aweaving in my clouded mind.

The dear brown eyes of Betty were the first sight that greeted mine. It was the warmth of her sweet lips that had roused me from my lethargy. As she saw my eyes open upon hers she started up with a cry of joy; but seeing, no doubt, the look of disappointment on my face, she pressed her lips again to mine, and her warm tears rolled down my cheeks.

"Hoots, lassie," said the voice of Dr Forbes from somewhere beyond the range of my vision, "dinna gie up hope. We'll pu' him through yet."

Betty raised her beautiful head.

"We have, Dad, we have!" she said brokenly, and it did me good to hear the joy

that mingled with her sobs, "He is conscious at last."

I tried to speak, but the words would not come, so instead I smiled weakly. Then I felt the old doctor's hand upon my brow, and saw his wholesome genial face looking down at me.

"Guid lad!" he said in a subdued voice. "Lie quait an' dinna be fashed. You're a richt noo. We'll mak' a man o' ye yet."

For days I lay weak and speechless, but happy. I could watch Betty as she sat by my bedside or moved about the room quietly, busy with the linen or the medicine bottles. I have since been told that it is a marvel my eyes did not fall out, so much did I turn and twist them in my efforts to miss no movement of my beloved.

I recovered my speech slowly, and at first they would not let me talk. Gradually, however, I regained my strength, and at last came a happy day when I could speak with Betty without fear of being "hushed" to silence.

"The Dad says it's all right," Betty told me with a happy smile. "So long as we don't discuss controversial subjects. You know what that means, Bob. You must ask no questions about . . . about the past."

As the one thing I wanted to hear about most was the past, that put somewhat of a damper upon me. I think, however, that the doctor soon saw that I was really beginning to worry about things, and that ignorance was more likely to retard my recovery than knowledge.

He came into my room one day soon after, and sat down by my bedside.

"Weel, Bob—for I doot ye'll ha'e tae be Bob tae me hereafter," he began in friendly fashion, and this was his first reference to the new relations between Betty and myself. "I daursay there's things ye wud like fine tae ken?"

"There are, Doctor," I answered. "But first, tell me—has Betty spoken to you of—of——"

"Ay, ay, lad, dinna fash yoursel'," he interrupted kindly, to save me the embarrassment of an avowal. "Betty has telt me that you want her. She nicht dae waur, ye ken. Dinna you fash yoursel' aboot that."

It may seem a grudging acceptance of a son-in-law, that "she nicht dae waur," but the Doctor was an undemonstrative old Scotsman, and the kindly pressure of his hand on mine meant more than the words.



"You'll be wantin' tae ken the end o' your adventure, I'm thinkin'?" he asked, quickly changing the subject.

"Yes," I answered eagerly. "What has become of Roy, and the Laird, and Marie? Where is Morgan? And——"

"Yin at a time—yin at a time," the Doctor interrupted, smiling at my eagerness. "I'd best juist tell ye the story in my ain words.

"Puir Roy!" He paused to let these words sink into my mind, and thus break the news more gently. "He was a fine lad, was Roy. It was a peety he got mixed up wi' that furrin woman. . . . He was deid when they found him. Him an' his faither—baith. Hoo it was that you escapit alive, Guid kens. But there wisna muckle life in you, come tae think on it. The caur loupit doon intae the bed o' the burn, a maitter o' fifty feet or mair, an' smashed itsel' tae smithereens again' the stanes. They brocht you back for deid, but Betty wud ha'e it that there was life in you, an' sure eneuch she was richt."

"And Marie?" I asked.

"I ken nowt o' her. Her disappearance wisna brocht up at the inquiry. The twa things werena connected. But she hisna been seen since."

"Then the Hopeton treasure is lost?" I exclaimed.

"So I understand frae Betty. I only ken what she has telt me aboot the treasure. The furrin woman is clear awa' wi' it—o' that you may be shair."

I lay silent, thinking of what he had told me.

"Perhaps it is as well," I said at last. "It has caused enough trouble, and I doubt if it will bring much happiness to Marie. By the way, how long have I been ill?"

"Mair than a month," replied Dr Forbes, to my astonishment.

"And what of Morgan — where is he now?"

"Efter everything was settled up, an' you were oot o' danger, he went awa' for a while, but he's back in the toon again, an' anxious tae see you, as sune as I'll gi'e him leave. In fact, he's been ca'in' me jailer, an' kidnapper, an' siclike, for the last week or mair. If you think it's no' ower muckle for you, we micht let him in the morn, juist lang eneuch tae speir the time o' day."

So next day I saw Morgan's beaming spectacles once again. He was unaffectedly delighted to see me, and stood rubbing his

hands and exclaiming, for an unconscionable time—

“Dear, dear, dear! This is a great day, Seaton. That jailer of yours is a holy terror. I should have seen you a week ago, but for his rules and regulations. He’s worse than a New York hall-porter.”

I smiled upon him and let him talk.

“Well, well, it’s all over now, thank God, but I can’t look at you lying there without blaming myself for your troubles. I got you into all this mess, Seaton, with these damned little pictures. Even at the last, I cried to you to do something, and landed you in for that unholy smash. Nobody but you knows what really happened that night. Was it an accident?”

Now I knew, as surely as I knew anything on this earth, that Roy had deliberately pulled the car across the road to save his false wife. He did it with a full knowledge of what would be the end, but—what good would come from speaking of it?

“Yes,” I answered. “A pure accident. . . . The light was bad. . . . The Laird was driving. . . . He did not see the bend in the road.”

“You had a marvellous escape. Dear, dear, dear, there wasn’t a sporting chance in

a million that you'd be alive—yet here you are, as full of beans as a pod."

"What of Marigold?" I asked.

"She is recovering," answered Morgan. "It was a terrible shock to her, but she is getting over it. Seaton, my boy, I've overcome all her objections at last, and she's going to marry me and come with me to the States. We shall take young Duncan with us, and let Hopeton until he grows up."

"The best thing you could do," I agreed heartily. "Take her right away to fresh surroundings. She could never be happy here."

. . . I was well enough to be at Marigold's wedding. It was a very quiet wedding, but looking at the faces of the bride and bridegroom I knew that it would turn out a happy one.

I have proved myself right, too, for Betty and I have twice journeyed to the States and visited the Morgans, and a happier household I have never seen—with one exception. But then, there is only one Betty.

Morgan, even now, will sometimes grow apologetic about the troubles he let me in for, and put them all down to those "damned little pictures." I never agree with him.

“ You mustn’t grumble, Morgan,” I tell him. “ We followed the little pictures, you know. The tragedy would have come just the same without them, but not the joy that is ours to-day.”

THE END.



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